

THE PROBLEMS OF INDIAN SOCIETY

DEVABRATA BOSE

FOREWORD BY

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FOREWORD

CASTE HAS BEEN a pervasive and a persisting feature of Indian society for three or four thousand years or more. Mr. Devabrata Bose has stated quite correctly that "Indian society of the past and of today can be characterised as caste society". In principle, caste is hereditary. The caste system, however, has not been static but has been changing continually all the time. India is now passing through the most difficult period of the early stages of industrialisation. At the present time it is particularly important to study the nature and directions of social changes in the future.

The author gives in this book a very useful analysis of many facets of the conflicts and ever changing social relations of the caste system in India. He has considered physical characteristics, numerical preponderance, division of labour, economic power based on income and wealth, political influence, and ritual and religious aspects of the caste hierarchy; and has pointed out that no one single factor can give an adequate description or explanation of the caste system.

The author has pointed out that the study of caste status is primarily a study of the local hierarchy and local conditions at the level of a single village or a group of villages, and sometimes of larger geographical units which are still local in character. There is both cooperation and conflict between a dominant caste in a locality (which has a high social status based on economic power and political influence) and the Brahmins whose supreme status is based on their ritual and religious functions as an intermediary between God and man, as having a special character of holiness, and as the embodiment of the highest ideals of the local system of beliefs and ideas. The dominant caste has to acknowledge the ritualistic or religious superiority of the Brahmin, and at the same time has to rely on the Brahmin for the ritual basis of its own position in society; and the Brahmin has to rely on the dominant caste for protection and maintenance. A similar principle of cooperation and at the same time of conflict is in operation in the relation between the dominant caste and its subordinate castes, and one may add, also between each individual

caste and the castes lower down in social or economic status, The hierarchical system is thus based on both cooperation and tension or conflict within the system itself.

The author has discussed the importance of the concept of pollution, widely varying permissivities and restrictions in taking food or in marriage rules between smaller subdivisions of the same caste, or in cross-cousin marriages of various types within the same sub-caste. The immense complexity of Indian society as a whole can be appreciated if it is remembered that, according to certain informed estimates, there are something like fourteen or fifteen thousand endogamous groups in India.

The author has considered very briefly a possible effect of industrialisation in undermining the caste system, for example, through the equalisation of income and wealth especially in rural areas, and through the weakening of marriage restrictions by expanding opportunities for social intercourse between man and woman in industrial areas. The steady increase in the number of inter-caste and also of inter-communal (Hindu-Muslim) marriages is indicative of future trends.

There would be, I think, general agreement with the broad results of the analysis given in this book. Also, in spite of the large number of books and studies on the origin of caste and its changing characteristics, there cannot be any dispute with the author's contention that available knowledge is still too meagre for firm conclusions or comprehensive generalisations. The usefulness of this book would lie essentially in stimulating further study and research on the caste system in India.

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PREFACE

A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT of data has been accumulated on Indian society in the last 100 years. They range from official censuses and surveys to various analyses and interpretations, as well as field-work monographs. Hutton estimated over 5000 titles in English on caste alone in the 1930s. Since then further additions have taken place.

This book in a way is an attempted tribute to all those painstaking individuals, from the village interviewer to the official and the college professor, who have contributed to this knowledge. Whilst it is difficult to go through all the reports and books about India and caste, an attempt has been made to concentrate on key censuses, caste surveys, field-work (especially recent ones) and literature on the subject, particularly works, which themselves summarise much of the field.

Social phenomena is complex, many-sided and liable to relatively quick change. In examining it, it often pays to accumulate considerable quantities of data in order to prove a point. In the long run it is more economical than indulging in endless arguments. I have tried, as much as possible, to let facts speak for themselves. Conclusions are attempted only when one has felt that the volume of data cannot but lead to them. Quantitative data has been used whenever possible, but not at the cost of descriptive accuracy. Space and subject matter limit the number of topics. Three, which have been left out, come to mind immediately. One is the subject of pre-British and modern land tenures. The second is the position of women. And the third is the question of a more detailed analysis of the Once-born, as quite an amount of space has been devoted to those, who are born twice. After all, one has to remember that the former make up the considerable majority of the population. Perhaps some persons would make the attempt.

The writer would welcome comments and suggestions on this book.

DEVABRATA BOSE

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THE PROBLEMS OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A VERY OLD civilization is changing. Some call it the oldest civilization in the world. We see or feel the impact of some of the changes. For us, who live in its midst, it is important to know in which direction it is changing and what we can do to achieve desirable social changes. But to foresee the direction of change, to judge its nature we have to know the present and the past, the immediate past and the more remote past. We have now a fairly considerable amount of literature bearing on the subject of Indian society — rural and urban censuses, surveys of castes and tribes, field studies, various monographs, reports, official and unofficial etc. — collected during the last hundred years. It is possible and necessary to assess the situation.

Indian society of the past and of today, can still be characterised as caste society. We shall discuss a little later what are the characteristics of Indian caste society. For the present we can note that locally it consists of a series of sub-castes, all of whom are not equal in status; occupation was generally hereditary in the past, and often is today; marriage is generally within the sub-caste. The Brahman is regarded as the highest caste, but may not have substantial political or economical power locally. This power may be possessed by castes other than Brahman, who, for this reason, can be termed 'dominant' in the area concerned.¹

Within the framework of this society certain changes have and are taking place. The arrival of the modern administration (British, and after independence, Indian) removed some of the political functions of the dominant castes. Modern factory production and commerce have penetrated the villages. Their impact was to increasingly undermine the traditional crafts, drive craftsmen into other occupations including agriculture, in general to increase the pressure on land; create new social classes within the framework of caste. This is anticipating future discussion.

¹ When we use the word 'caste' in modern Indian society, what is implied is actually sub-caste. The word 'caste', however, will be used, as frequent use of the word sub-caste is clumsy.

It, however, brings under review the range of problems that have to be studied. Obviously all of it cannot be attempted within the space of the present book. This makes it necessary to consider whether certain priorities can be fixed or not. Fixing priorities inevitably leads to asking whether there are certain key problems or key questions, attempting to answer which may lead not only to giving an answer to these problems, but also elucidating to some extent a whole series of related problems.

An important feature of caste society is its hierarchical nature, that some castes are higher than others in status. We may be permitted to ask why this is so. The answer to this question involves not only the factors which are associated with a high caste or a low caste status, but also questions like the nature of dominant castes, the relation of Brahmans and untouchables to other castes in different parts of India.

Though caste has deeply affected non-Hindu communities in India, the focus of our enquiries will be the Hindu community. We shall refer to the caste system as the Hindu caste system or the Muslim caste system or the Hindu caste system of a certain region like the Uttar Pradesh or Tamilnad, and not as the Indian caste system. This is in the interests of being more specific.

Our main enquiry will be to find what are the factors associated with caste status. Let us clarify what we mean by caste status. Status in Hindu society is not purely secular, as, let us say, in some western countries. There is an element of ritual involved in it. Notions of purity and impurity, including spiritual impurity, are involved in it. Hence when we seek to find factors associated with caste status, it is with 'ritual' status that we are dealing with. Unless specifically mentioned the term status will be used in the sense of ritual status in these pages.

In the fairly considerable body of literature that exists on caste in India we get the following groups of explanations of or the factors associated with caste status in Hindu society.

Caste status is correlated with physical characteristics, with anthropometric characteristics. Here the theory is that certain races have conquered certain other races and subordinated the latter as subordinate castes.

Caste status is correlated with, is determined by numerical size—the larger the size, the higher the rank of that caste.

Caste status is correlated with wealth, with property holding.

Reasons of ritual purity, 'aara', determine caste status.

Sometimes a combination of some of the above factors are suggested as determining caste status.

Let us examine the available data.

But first at the risk of repeating others on the subject let us from this body of data give an outline of some of the salient features of the Hindu caste system.

It is, first, definitely a hierarchical system. The Brahman is clearly designated by local Hindus to be at the top and equally clearly the untouchables are placed at the bottom. There is also considerable agreement among the local population about a caste or a number of castes which occupy a position at the top near the Brahman, at the top with respect to their high status, and about those castes which are near the Untouchables. A certain ambiguity exists among the middle range of castes as to which is higher or lower among them.

Most authorities are agreed that food regulations, the taboo on taking food cooked by certain castes, as well as water, form the central expression of status evaluation.³

In certain areas distances between castes as to how near certain castes can come to others are also an expression e.g. in Malabar. Segregation of living quarters may be another feature, as in Maharashtra, Andhra and Karnatak. But the most universal rules and the ones, which permit of the most detailed expression of caste status would, however, seem to be those regarding food, drink, smoking and eating together. These can then be used as the means of judging *the relative status* of castes. [cf. Hutton, Ibbetson and Ghurye].

Though the top and the bottom of all local Hindu societies are clearly marked out, status evaluation in the middle regions of the society is confused. Ibbetson pointed this out in the Punjab Census Report of 1881 that Hindu society was not static, that

³ Hutton, *Caste*, p. 71. Ibbetson D. *Report on the Punjab Census, 1881*, p. 184. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p. 7.

castes competed against each other in status: "Thus we see that in India, as in all countries, society is arranged in strata which are based upon differences of social or political importance, or of occupation. But here the classification is hereditary rather than individual to the persons included under it, and an artificial standard is added which is peculiar to caste and which must be conformed with on pain of loss of position, while the rules that forbid social intercourse between castes of different rank render it infinitely difficult to rise in the scale. So too, the classification being hereditary, it is next to impossible for the individual himself to rise; it is the tribe or section of the tribe (read 'extended kin group' for 'tribe' as being a more appropriate term for a society which has passed out of the tribal stage to the caste stage—Author), that alone can improve its position, and this it can do only after the lapse of several generations, during which time it must abandon a lower for a higher occupation, conform more strictly with the arbitrary rules, affect social exclusiveness or special sanctity, or separate itself after some similar fashion from the body of the caste to which it belongs. . . . As in all other countries and among all other nations, the graduations of the social scale are fixed; but society is not solid but liquid, and portions of it are continually rising and sinking and changing their position as measured by that scale; and the only real difference between Indian society and that of other countries in this respect is, that the liquid is much more viscous, the friction and inertia to be overcome infinitely greater, and the movement therefore far slower in the former than in the latter. This friction and inertia are largely due to a set of artificial rules which have been grafted on the social prejudices common to all communities by the peculiar form which caste has taken in the Brahmanical teachings." (p. 176).

Recently many field workers have noted this fact in village studies made in various parts of India. M. N. Srinivas says: "It is possible everywhere to say who are the Brahmans and the Untouchables, but there is a great confusion in the middle regions."¹ He points out that the claim of a Mysore trading caste to be Vaishya is hotly contested by the other castes in the area. He remarks, "Disputes as to relative status are an essential feature

¹ M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs*, p. 25.

of the caste system;"⁴ and that these conflicts and contradictions occur chiefly (a) between castes near to each other in the hierarchy or (b) between castes trying to rise.⁵ Dube records the same state of affairs in the middle range castes in his study of a Telugu village in Andhra, where in the middle range castes like the Kapu-Reddi, Kumara and Golla castes "will freely interdine with each other and social contact with them is on the basis of equality."⁶ And where also the more or less equal Sakkali and Mangali or the Sale and Gaondla castes neither intermarry nor interdine (ibid). A. Mayer examining the Malwa village of Ram Kheri has recorded a similar state of affairs.⁷

Later we shall have occasion to remark on this competition between castes and their rise and fall in status which goes on. But enough has been stated to show that the contradictions which occur in the reports of status evaluation which occur in the reports of certain castes are not due to errors on the part of the sociologist but are rooted in the system itself.

The Concept of Pollution

Readers are familiar with this concept. It is universal throughout Hindu society. It may be necessary to touch on it here. Every caste study, every field work bears witness to the operation of this concept in Hindu society. S. F. Nadel, an Austrian anthropologist, remarks that it is this concept which distinguishes Hindu caste society from some other caste-like societies. We shall have occasion to discuss Nadel's remarks later.⁸ We can isolate certain features, certain beliefs in the Concept of Pollution.

First, the life principle is sacred and destruction of life for making a living is polluting. So snaring birds and killing them is polluting. The Kshatriya, it may be replied, is supposed to do a lot of killing. He seems to be excused because such slaying of men that he may do is sporadic and then in defence of society.

⁴ Op. cit.

⁵ Op. cit.

⁶ *Indian Village*, p. 57.

⁷ A. Mayer: *South-Western Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 12 No. 2.

⁸ S. F. Nadel, 'Caste and Government in Primitive Society,' *Journal of the Anthropological Society*, p. 16 seq., 1959.

The pollution arising from the destruction of life seems to be associated with two levels of ideas. On the lower level it seems associated with beliefs of the spirits of killed beings haunting the killer and the danger of coming close to him. This idea is often found in preliterate societies. On the other hand the principle is associated with that branch of Hindu philosophy which regards all life as sacred and hence its destruction as sin.

Secondly, death and decay are polluting. This principle may also have an association with notions of spirits of dead creatures attaching themselves to those in contact with them. On the other hand it may be pointed out that such ideas may be associated with the dread of disease which has been found empirically to be infectious. Both appear to be true. Occupations associated with death and decay are hence regarded as polluting.

Thirdly, all human emissions and associated occupations are polluting. Pigs and fowls eat offal and such emissions, and consequently are regarded as polluting.

Fourthly, the cow is sacred above all creatures. Killing it, flaying it, dealing with its skin, eating it are sinful. Sin is sometimes polluting.

Fifthly, certain other creatures—some monkeys, cobras, squirrels etc. are also sacred in varying degrees in some localities and to that extent killing or eating them is sinful and hence polluting.

The sources of impurity are thus seen to be arising from death, decay, human emissions, disease, unclean animals; from sin arising from the taking of life and notions of spirits of dead creatures haunting and contaminating the sinners; from the sin of killing and eating cows and from sin in general. Radhakrishnan says that the promotion of the purity of the body, particularly the inner purity of the body, promotes purity of the mind.⁹ The concept of pollution is thus concerned with both physical and spiritual pollution.

Sixthly, drinking alcohol is polluting. This may be due to the idea that alcohol reduces mental control which is the essential path to spiritual liberation.

Internal pollution is more serious than external pollution—drinking or eating polluting substances more serious than touching

⁹ Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, Allen and Unwin, p. 133.

them. It is interesting to note the notion that the conductivity of different vessel with respect to conveying pollution varies. Thus the contents of earthenware vessels are more susceptible to pollution than those in metalware vessels. The nature of such products of the cow as milk, clarified butter and dung are a protection against pollution.

Pollution may be permanent or temporary. Temporary pollution is situational and can be removed by purificatory ritual. If not removed, it becomes permanent. The degrees of permanent purity or pollution fixes ritual status. It orders behaviour and attitudes as between groups.

It is of interest to note in passing that pollution is associated with death, decay, human emissions, disease, unclean animals, the relative porosity of containers—earthenware or metallic etc. They would seem to indicate early notions of infection and infectious diseases, no doubt arrived at empirically, and in the absence of microscopical evidence conceived in terms of spirituous substances. The idea that dead spirits of human beings and animals haunt those, who had been associated with them before their deaths, would perhaps even receive confirmation from disease arising out of such contacts.

It is necessary now to examine certain structural features of the Hindu caste system so as to define more clearly the problems we face in our present enquiry. Considerable local variation occurs in the system. Thus castes with same names have different occupations. Castes with different names have similar occupations but different statuses, perhaps, in the various regions. Jats are high caste, for instance, in the U.P. village of Rani Khera.¹⁰ In other areas of the western U.P. and the Punjab, Blunt classifies them as middle groups with the same rank as the Gujars.¹¹ In south India the castes are again divided into those of the right and those of the left-hand—a feature not found in the north. Nevertheless certain common features also exist.

The name Brahman is to be found in all the regions of Hindu India and everywhere the Brahman caste is at the top of the ritual hierarchy. Society is divided into the 'interior' and the

¹⁰ *Village India*, p. 145 Sq.—O. Lewis. Also O. Lewis: *Village Life in N. India*.

¹¹ Blunt, *Caste System of Northern India*, p. 98.

'exterior' castes or the touchables and the untouchables. Among the touchables there is a hierarchy which is headed by the Brahman. Power is exercised by the touchable group as a whole against the untouchable to keep them in their place. This is the first stratification, the first level of power. Hindu society is not a society of equal castes. Among the touchable castes there may be, and generally is, further stratification. Investigations have revealed that there is among them on a local scale a number of families belonging to a certain caste or a number of castes, who are politically and economically dominant. They have been described as the local dominant caste groups. A number of points have to be clarified about them before we proceed further.

(1) Not all members of these local dominant castes may possess this secular power, though they do share to some extent the reflected glory and the prestige and status that pertains to it. Their status is raised by their being the caste brethren of these dominant elements.

Alternatively, if they continued to lag behind or sink in secular power, a fission between them and their more powerful caste brothers may take place.¹²

(2) There may be more than one group of caste families aspiring for secular domination in the area at any one point in time though power would devolve on one caste group eventually.

(3) We have to consider not only the caste groups which are dominant locally, we have also to take into account various levels of dominance—the village, the district, the regional and state levels. Thus in Malwa in pre-British days elements of a Maratha nobility controlled the state. Below them were the Rajput feudatories. On the village level in some villages Rajput families, and in other Kalotas were dominant.¹³ When we discuss the dominant caste we should specify the level of dominance also. In our discussion we shall primarily talk of the dominant caste on the village and local level. When we refer to a dominant caste the frame of reference is primarily local. Later we shall discuss it on the higher and state levels also. In all this our

¹² Ibbetson, op. cit., pp. 174-176;

Blunt, op. cit. pp. 50 and 55.

¹³ A. C. Mayer, 'Dominant Caste in a Region of Central India,' *South-Western Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 1958, p. 426.

primary concern will be not with one particular caste but the characteristics of dominant castes in general.

The organization of the Indian village, generally, then, is a division between clean and unclean castes and the organization of various service, artisan and farmer castes round one or two powerful caste families, which can be described as the dominant group or groups.

S. F. Nadel, the social anthropologist, has defined caste society as "the segmentation of society in rigid fashion, the various segments being based on descent and permitting no mobility or intermarriage; a differentiation of occupation which goes hand in hand with social inequality, that is with an unequal share in existing benefits and unequal claims to status and esteem; we mean also an inequality which is not only *de facto* but *de jure*, it is as it should be. So that the lower castes are despised, not only unhappily underprivileged; they bear a stigma, apart from being unfortunate. Conversely the higher castes are not merely entitled to the possession of coveted privileges but are also in some way exalted and endowed with a higher dignity." The discussions we have had above, it seems, tends to substantiate this statement of Nadel. With respect to Hindu society, however, Nadel points out that it has this further characteristic—the notion of Pollution.

The Brahman is at the top of the ritual hierarchy, but the caste holding political and economic power need not be Brahman.

A series of interesting questions arise as regards the dominant caste and we can set them down here:

(1) What caste can become dominant? Can an untouchable caste become dominant? Can a caste below the pollution line become dominant?

(2) What relationships exist between high caste status and factors like political power, wealth, numerical size, racial characteristics and so on?

(3) Can a caste be called dominant if it is powerful in the economic sphere only or must this power be supplemented by political power also?

With respect to this last question, at the cost of anticipating later discussion, let us state here that mere economic power or

wealth by itself will not give the caste holding it a preponderant, ruling position in all spheres of village life. For example, in a U.P. village called Kisan Garhi the local Jats and the Brahmans are equally powerful economically, both own about the same amount of land, but the Jats are still dominant as they hold political power. Hence the local Brahmans are trying to capture political power.¹⁴ Conversely, political power without economic power to back it up leaves the holders more or less either in the position of agents of an economically powerful group or groups, or in a position in which they must use political office and power to secure economic strongholds. An example is that of the Chamars of Madhopur village in the U.P., who won a village election and controlled the village council, but they were now faced with an economic boycott by the wealthy land-owning Rajputs, which broke their temporary ascendancy, and they had to resign from the village council.¹⁵ In other words, for a caste to be called dominant, it must possess both political and economical power.

(4) Irrespective of the fact whether the Brahmans hold local political and economical power i.e. are the local dominant caste, they remain in the ritual scale the highest caste, as we have seen before. What then is the relationship between the Brahmans and the local dominant castes? And what is it that gives the Brahman this supreme position in the ritual hierarchy?

We shall take up these questions in the book.

Concepts of 'Dharma' and 'Karma'

Apart from the Concept of Pollution Hindu caste society is characterised by widespread notions of 'Dharma' and 'Karma'. According to Srinivas these two notions have helped very greatly in the strengthening of the idea of hierarchy, which is inherent in the caste system.¹⁶ That is, they have had an important social function to play. As they have been so often and widely discussed it is enough just to give a brief reference to them.

¹⁴ *India's Villages*, pp. 107 sq.

¹⁵ Cohn, *Village India*, p. 72.

¹⁶ Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs*, p. 23.

We can distinguish two 'norms' of conduct in Hindu society and may call them the 'ordinary' and the 'extraordinary'. The extraordinary norm is followed by the ascetic, the 'sannyasi'. The ordinary norm is the only one possible for the great mass of men. With respect to this way of life the scriptural texts speak of three broad aims. They are 'dharma', 'artha', and 'kama'. 'Dharma' may be defined as propriety, socially approved conduct in relation to one's fellowmen, to the world of life in general and to the supernatural powers. Under dharma would come law, morality and what is known as religion. Each caste has got its own specific law, duties, code, morality etc., which the person belonging to that caste must obey. Living according to the dharma is rewarded by rebirth in a higher caste. Violation of dharma is punished by birth in a lower caste.

'Artha' is profit, worldly advantage, success.

'Kama' can be described as 'love', enjoyment, pleasure. The ordinary person must attain all three—dharma, artha and kama. The highest rebirth is being born a Brahman whence liberation is obtained. Man is then released from the chain of rebirths or from the law of karma.

These ideas are widespread, though one cannot just now say how far they have permeated the thought of ordinary people. But as Srinivas points out that irrespective of individual consciousness about them, they play a powerful role in society.¹⁷ Weber says that the combination of caste legitimacy with the doctrine of 'karma' was a stroke of genius, which, wedded with the given social order, gave it an irresistible power over the thought and hope of its members by its promise of rebirth.¹⁸

Caste Status and Its Correlates

What factors then correlate with caste status?

We have noted two types of caste status—(1) high caste status as expressed through the rules regarding purity and impurity, the pollution rules, (2) dominant caste status. We saw that the highest caste is not necessarily the politically and economically

¹⁷ Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs*, p. 25.

¹⁸ Stevenson, *Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System*, JRAI.

most powerful caste. The frame of reference in each case is different.

H. N. Stevenson¹⁹ states that "change of group ritual status by endogamous groups may be both upward and downward, upward being secured only by generations of conformation to behaviour patterns which avoid pollution, and by severing marital and commensal relations with any non-conforming section."

Unfortunately he takes as a hypothetical example an untouchable group wishing to raise its status and quotes Srinivas to this effect. (Refer Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs*, p. 30). But the example given by Srinivas is that of a low caste, not an untouchable caste. Recent village studies, as we shall see later, indicate that it is just the untouchables that find it generally impossible to cross the barrier of untouchability.²⁰ As we shall see later considerable number of untouchables have adopted upper caste practices, obeyed the rules derived from the Pollution Concept and yet have remained where they had been in the past. Therefore in their caste case it is not true to say that a low status group remains low because its practices are 'low'. We shall see to what extent such a theory that a caste can raise its status by being 'purer' in its practice holds good.

We have two problems of correlation. The first is what correlates with a high ritual status. Is it numerical size? Physical characteristics? Economic power?

The second is which castes can become dominant in the sense of political-economic dominance. Can untouchable castes become dominant or must there be a minimum ritual status necessary for the achievement of a dominant position for any caste? We can also ask the question, has numerical size or physical characteristics any connection with caste dominance?

We shall try to answer these two problems. The method will be in the case of the first set of correlations to place ritual status, so to say, in the left-hand column and find what correlates with it in the right hand column. Thus,

¹⁹ M. Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 131.
1954, p. 63

²⁰ Blunt, op. cit. pp. 300-1; Cohn, *Village India*, p. 72; Bailey, op. cit. pp. 226-7.

High ritual status	Correlates with— numerical size physical characteristics wealth, etc.
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In the second set of correlates we shall place 'dominant status' in the left hand column and see if this status correlates with high ritual status size, physical characteristics and so on. Thus,

Dominant caste status	Correlates with— high ritual status numerical size physical characteristics wealth, etc.
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Such methods help to bring more precision in analysing complex social *phenomena*.

Chapter 2

NUMERICAL PREPONDERANCE, HIGH CASTE STATUS, DOMINANT CASTE STATUS

HERE WE DEAL with the question --- 'have numbers anything to do with high caste status and with the dominant position of any caste?' In a given locality a certain caste possesses political power or economical power. Has numerical size anything to do with this position? We must also define the extent of 'local'--- whether it should be the village or a larger area around the village.

In the same way we must see whether a high caste status has anything to do with numerical preponderance or not, and what relation numbers have with a very low caste status like that of the untouchables. In short, we shall try to check the relation of caste dominance and high caste status to numerical preponderance.

If one makes the proposition that the dominant caste is the largest caste in the village, that may mean either that it is the largest single caste in the village; or, that it is larger than the rest of the village population combined.

Let us examine the villages that have been surveyed in recent field work to see if there is a relation between caste status and numerical size.

In the field survey of 14 villages included in the books 'Village India' and 'India's Villages' which cover 4 villages in South India, and 10 in North India, it has been found that only in 2 of the North Indian villages is the dominant caste numerically equal to the other largest caste. This is the case in one out of the four South Indian villages. In the remaining 8 North Indian villages the dominant caste is the largest in only three. In the 3 remaining South Indian villages the dominant caste is the largest single caste in all of them. From this survey, it would seem that in more than 50% of the cases, i.e. in 6 out of 11 villages, the dominant caste is also the largest single caste in numbers. These figures, however, are not necessarily significant. The 14 villages selected do not form an adequate sample to form any conclusion. Again, we should note that the village

has been used for measuring caste dominance. We should not use the village only, but preferably a social unit larger than the village, also, a unit with which the village has numerous ties of kinship, trade and political connections. We should appraise village data against this background. Another reason why the village should not be the only unit of measurement is because in certain areas, for instance in Tanjore or in the Western Himalayas, the villages are sometimes practically single caste villages. That caste status and caste dominance should be assessed in an area larger than the village is the view of a number of recent anthropologists. For instance, Marriot, in referring to Indian villages like Kisan Garhi in the U.P. says:¹ "They cannot be conceived as things in themselves in their organization of marriage and kinship, residence patterns, modes of conflict or caste organization. Nor are they ever likely to have been conceivable as isolates since Indian civilization began". In an article entitled 'The Extensions of an Indian Village'² Opler writes about a U.P. village called Senapur: "In the first place Senapur does not stand alone. It is one of a cluster of villages covering a seventy square mile area which have tradition of a common origin and descent". About the Deccan village of Dewara, Dube writes: "The village is a distinct structural unity like the kin-group caste and tribe. All these entities control the conduct of the individual. Several villages come together both temporarily as well as permanently to form a wider structure. Dewara is the leader of a group consisting sixteen villages."³ Kathleen Gough in "The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village" writes: "The vertical unity of the village has always been counterbalanced by the horizontal unity of each sub-caste. Traditionally each caste group of the village appears to have belonged to an endogamous sub-caste extending over some fifteen to twenty villages".⁴ Miller studying a "North Keralan Village" points out the importance of understanding the horizontal unity of individual castes with affiliations over wide areas, sharing a common culture".⁵

Steed writes of Kasandra village in Gujarat that "Caste

¹ *Village India*, p. 181.

² *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Nov. 1956, pp. 5-10.

³ *India's Villages*, p. 191.

⁴ *Village India*, p. 49.

⁵ *India's Villages*, pp. 49-50.

panchayats in Kasandra were parts of larger intervillage caste associations".⁶

Srinivas mentions the horizontal unity of castes in which caste alliance go beyond the village.⁷

Smith writing of the "Social Structure in the Punjab" says: "The self-sufficiency of the Punjab village, however, can be greatly overestimated The Punjab village has already been described as an exogamous unit."⁸

Newell says the following of a Gaddi village in the Western Himalayas: "(The result is that) there are multitudes of inter-village affinal links which tie the various villages together."⁹

All this is not to deny the usefulness of using the village as a unit of measurement, but to stress the importance of assessing it in the context of the wider region.

We have now to consider another question: the caste dominant in a village may not be the dominant group in the region larger than the village. That is to say there are different levels of caste dominance. The dominant caste of the larger region may not be the same as that which is dominating a village. In the village the particular dominant caste may or may not be numerically the largest caste. But as we saw villages are bound with other villages by many ties, including that of caste. If we are not to go by the idea that Indian society is a collection of isolated villages, we have to consider the question of the domination of a region larger than the village by a caste or castes. If this is the case, if the region is a more satisfactory isolable unit, with respect to caste dominance, then we have to look for a satisfactory regional unit. Later on we shall discuss the significance of doing this in more detail. For our present purpose we have taken the present administrative district as our unit. First, of course, it is the only one currently available in literature on the subject. Apart from this reason, however, the district is in many areas the traditional unit, a unit with respect to local government, local market towns etc. As we are going to take into account all the districts of a province any distortions with respect to caste size by the arbitrary demarcation of district boun-

⁶ *Village India*, p. 108.

⁷ *India's Villages*, pp. 5-6.

⁸ *India's Villages*, p. 152.

⁹ *Ibid* p. 58.

daries will be made up in the adjoining areas. On the average we should get an approximately correct picture of the numerical relations between castes in the areas concerned. It has also to be pointed out that the district or region is in turn a part of a larger whole, and that kings, governors and state administration are as much a feature of Hindu society as the village is. There is an interrelation between them and the village and the region. Later on, when we discuss caste dominance at various levels, we shall discuss this interrelationship.

The Census of 1891 has been used as the source for population statistics, because it is important to choose an early census which would give a picture of traditional caste society less affected by social change. By 1891 it was felt that the Census had gathered sufficient experience and technique vis-a-vis the earlier ones. Hence it seemed a reasonable year to select, a period also just before the turn of the century. The Census of 1891 has also been used by authorities like Crooke and Risley and could be linked with discussions on their findings.

Measuring on a district basis we find that in Baroda State (1) the high caste status of the Brahmans was not due to numerical superiority over other castes.

(2) The Kunbis are a middle caste agricultural group and the Kolis are also in agriculture but lower in status. Both these castes are the most numerous castes in practically all the divisions.

(3) Even if we add all the 'twice-born' castes—the Brahmans, the military and dominant and the Vantias together they are less than the rest of the population, and except in Amreli division they are less than the Koli population. Their high caste status is not associated with superiority in numbers.

(4) The dominant caste status of such groups do not appear to be due to their superior numbers in Baroda. In no division are they the single largest caste.

The same relations hold in other areas also. In most cases neither high caste status nor caste dominance is associated with larger numbers. Let us take the Uttar Pradesh. The Census of 1891 reports that generally the largest single caste in the state are the Chamars and not the Rajputs, except in the Hill districts. If a district-wise breakdown is made we find that the ratio of Rajput to Chamars in 12 districts is 1:2. In 13 districts it is

1:1.5. In 8 districts it is 1:3. In 5 districts it is between 1:4 and 1:5.

It is obvious that the Rajputs do not form the single largest caste in the districts barring the Hill ones. As they are supposed to be one of the dominant castes, if not the dominant caste in the U.P., it is obvious that caste dominance is not associated with numerical superiority in their case.

The same relations exist with respect to the status of the Brahmans in the U.P. A district-wise breakdown shows that they are numerically the largest single caste in 10 districts out of 49 or in about 20% of the total number of districts in the state. Their high caste status is not associated with numerical superiority.¹⁰

In Rajasthan again in only 3 out of the 14 districts of the former Rajput states were the Rajputs numerically the largest single caste. In the case of the Brahmans they were numerically the largest single caste in 6 out of 14 districts.

The same ratios exist, for instance, in Malabar in South India. In 1891 it was composed mainly of the states of Travancore and Cochin and the area of British Malabar. In none of the states were the Brahmans the single largest caste. The Nayar is held to be the generally dominant caste (other than the Brahmans of Malabar). But Nayar includes non-military, farming and artisan Nayars also. Nevertheless it is only in Travancore that this heterogeneous group, some of which are not dominant, was the single largest caste. The single largest caste in Malabar was the toddy-tapping Tiyan and in Cochin the toddy-tapping Izhuvan. In no case were the Nayars larger than the rest of the population, nor was the total of the military and dominant together with the Brahmans larger than the rest.

The same relation holds, for instance in the Marathi-speaking districts of the former Central Provinces. Neither the Marathas, nor other dominant castes, nor the Brahmans were in the majority of cases the single largest castes.

We have gathered data from an extensive area and this data points to the fact that on the district level neither high caste status nor caste dominance is associated with numerical superiority.

¹⁰ cf tables of numerical ratios of castes in the different states and areas at the end of Chapter.

NUMERICAL RATIOS OF CASTES IN BARODA STATE
(1891)

Ratios of	Amerili <i>division.</i>	Kadi <i>div.</i>	Navseri <i>div.</i>	Baroda City
Total of military & dominant castes (Rajputs and Marathas)	21,452	60,208	8,085	37,631
Peasant castes	31,245	248,394	16,677	137,302
Total of military & dominant castes (Rajputs and Marathas)	21,452	60,208	8,085	37,631
Kolis	17,932	243,065	24,824	181,069
Total of military & dominant castes (Brahmans and Vania)	40,930	165,195	31,332	94,504
Kolis	17,932	243,065	24,824	181,069
Total of military & dominant castes (Brahmans and Vania)	40,930	165,195	31,332	94,504
Rest of population	134,617	907,857	270,899	591,174
Brahmans	11,762	56,150	18,113	32,667
Kolis	17,932	243,065	24,824	181,069
Brahmans	11,762	56,150	18,113	32,667
Kunbis	31,245	248,394	16,677	173,302

17110

(Source Census of Baroda 1891)

NUMERICAL RATIOS OF IN BRITISH MALABAR
TRAVANCORE & COCHIN

(1) MALABAR

<i>Ratios of</i>	
Nayars	377,827
<hr/>	
Tiyyans	512,060
Total military & dominant castes	383,545
<hr/>	
Tivvans	512,060
Total of Brahmans, military & dominant castes	434,148
<hr/>	
Tiyyans	512,060
Total of Brahmans, military & dominant castes	434,148
<hr/>	
Rest of population	2,218,417

(2) TRAVANCORE STATE

In Travancore in the Census of 1891 the Nayars formed the single largest group (483,725). The next largest in size are the toddy-tapping Izhuvans (414,217).

<i>Ratios of</i>	
Nayars	483,725
<hr/>	
Izhuvans	414,217
Total military & dominant castes	492,105
<hr/>	
Rest of population	2,065,631
Military & dominant castes and Brahmans	535,700
<hr/>	
Rest of population	2,022,036

COCHIN STATE

In Cochin State according to the Census of 1891 the Nayars are less in numbers (101,691) than the Izhuvan toddy-tappers (167,467).

Ratios of

Nayars	101,691
<hr/> Izhuvans	<hr/> 167,467
Total military & dominant caste	103,448
<hr/> Izhuvans	<hr/> 167,467
Total military & dominant caste and Brahmans	130,577
<hr/> Izhuvans	<hr/> 167,467
Total military & dominant castes and Brahmans	130,577
<hr/> Rest of population	<hr/> 592,329

The Nayar population probably includes non-military Nayars like service, artisan and farming Nayars—a heterogeneous population. Only in Travancore do they form the single largest caste. In no cases are the Nayars or the total military and dominant castes larger than the rest of the population not even so if we also include the Brahmans.

The numerical ratios of Brahmans to other castes in the district of Malabar, in Cochin and Travancore States according to the Census of 1891 were as follows:—

Brahman	50,603		
<hr/> Tiyar	<hr/> 512,060		
Brahman		43,595	25,388
<hr/> Izhuvan		<hr/> 414,217	<hr/> 167,467
Brahman	50,603	43,595	25,388
<hr/> Nayar	<hr/> 377,827	<hr/> 483,725	<hr/> 101,691

The caste superiority of the Brahmans is not due to numerical superiority in any of these areas.

(Sources of above tables: Government of India, Census of India, Madras, 1891).

The Marathas are one of the dominant castes in the Maharashtra speaking areas. In Bombay province in the Census of 1891 they seem to have been included both among the Rajputs and the Kshatriyas of area, and hence it is difficult to judge whether Marathas were returned as Rajputs and Kshatriyas or not. In the Maharashtra speaking areas of what was then the Central Provinces, however, they have been classified separately. This is the breakdown for caste ratios there:-

	DISTRICT.					
RATIO OF Maratha	HOSHAN- GABAD	NIRNAR	BETUL	CHUND- WARA	WARDHA	NAGPUR.
	831	1,740	7,649	10,623	10,771	11,375
Kunbi	22,975	22,999	49,879	26,130	81,455	153,982
Total mil. & domt.	89,413	40,097	7,679	10,623	10,771	23,921
Kunbis	22,975	22,999	49,879	26,130	81,455	153,982
Total mil. & domt.	89,413	40,097	7,649	10,623	10,771	23,921
total cultivator castes:	74,557	34,318	82,555	64,188	111,005	207,767
Brahman	33,604	12,671	3,427	7,124	11,124	22,654
Kunbi	22,975	22,999	49,879	26,130	81,455	153,982
Nos. of Banias:	6,224	7,145	574	1,908	4,218	7,270

*(Sources: Govt. of India, Census of India,
Bombay Province, 1891)*

Many of the military and dominant including Marathas are also cultivators.

A typical example of the numerical ratios of Brahmans and Rajputs to the Chamars, who generally form the single largest caste not only in Rajasthan, but also in the Uttar Pradesh, is given by the following figures for Rajasthan. The ratios generally hold good for the Rajputs in Rajasthan, and in the case of the Rajputs and Brahmans in the U.P.:-

1. In Lawa	170	Brahmans
	<hr/> 426	Chamars
2. Jaipur	360,401	Brahmans
	<hr/> 243,048	Chamars
3. Alwar	77,899	Brahmans
	<hr/> 82,936	Chamars
4. Bhartpur	77,924	Brahmans
	<hr/> 94,637	Chamars
5. Dholpur	38,094	Brahmans
	<hr/> 39,643	Chamars
6. Karauli	21,721	Brahmans
	<hr/> 21,282	Chamars
7. Jhalwar	21,721	Brahmans
	<hr/> 21,282	Chamars
8. Bundi	22,825	Brahmans
	<hr/> 21,535	Chamars
9. Shalpora	4,845	Brahmans
	<hr/> 5,652	Chamars
10. Dholpur	38,094	Brahmans
	<hr/> 39,643	Chamars
11. Dungarpur	13,299	Brahmans
	<hr/> 22,881	Chamars

12. Sirohi	13,001	Brahmans
	<hr/> 17,480	Chamars
13. Newar	133,446	Brahmans
	<hr/> 113,427	Chamars
14. Bikanir	84,446	Brahmans
	<hr/> 88,350	Chamars
15. Jaisalmer	5,815	Brahmans
	<hr/> 7,976	Chamars
16. Marwar & Malani	202,510	Brahmans
	<hr/> 183,082	Chamars

(Sources: Govt. of India, *Census of India, Rajputana, 1891.*)

CASTE STATUS AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS — CORRELATIONS

A NUMBER OF authors have advanced the view that caste status is related to racial differences. In other words there is a correlation between them. For instance, Risley says, "If we take a series of castes in Bengal, Bihar, the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, or Madras, and arrange them in the order of the average nasal index so that the caste with the finest (i.e. in the sense of measurement — author) nose shall be at the top, and that with the coarsest nose at the bottom of the list, it will be found that the order substantially corresponds with the accepted order of social precedence."¹ To some readers such language may sound somewhat vulgar, but as the subject under discussion deals with physical characteristics and their relation to caste status, it will have to be put with for the time being.

Risley's large-scale survey of anthropometric measurements of castes and tribes in India has been criticized by statisticians and sociologists on technical grounds.² His use of language groups, such as Dravidians, as a basis for physical classification has been challenged. His sampling was inadequate. He even gave instructions to his field workers to make their measurements fit his theory, stated above. He has been criticized for exercising inadequate control over his measurements. We have to bear in mind these criticisms, if and when we refer to Risley's data.

Because of the criticism of the earlier surveys, including Risley's, in 1941 it was decided to conduct another anthropometric sample survey on more rigorous scientific lines to elicit information from it about caste and physical characteristics. This was followed by a series of similar studies. We shall refer to these studies. The first area was the Uttar Pradesh. The task was undertaken by the anthropologist Dr. D. N. Majumdar, Professor P. C. Mahalanobis and Dr. C. R. Rao of the Indian Statistical Institute. The characteristics, which were selected for measurement, were

selected on the basis of being easily discernible, possessing stability and racial significance. With the development of new statistical methods of multivariate analysis, it was not felt necessary to increase the number of traits to be measured. Usually the following 12 measurements were taken: (1) stature, (2) sitting height, (3) head length, (4) head breadth, (5) minimum frontal breadth, (6) nasal length, (7) nasal breadth, (8) nasal depth, (9), total facial length, (10) upper facial length, (11) bizygomatic breadth, (12) bigonial breadth. The measurements were all taken by Dr. D. N. Majumdar and checked with the assistance of a trained staff. The statistical analysis of the data was then undertaken by the Indian Statistical Institute, under the direction of Professor Mahalanobis and Dr. Rao. In order to remove any charge of bias during computation and tabulation, the names of the castes and the tribes concerned were substituted by code words. The traits measured were also similarly substituted. The opinion of the Indian Statistical Institute, regarding the samples obtained, was that they had "been drawn for all practical purposes at random. As far as one can judge, the assumption of randomness is more true of the present material than of any other series of anthropometric measurements so far available in India."³ The sample sizes were also considered adequate. The following is the general summary of the analysis of the data made by Mahalanobis and Rao. As the report is technical, we shall quote them:

"The Brahmans (called the B-cluster) occupy the highest social position in Hindu society, have the largest built of face and body with tall stature, large facial breadth and comparatively large nasal length and biggest nasal depth but narrow nasal breadth. As one goes down from the top to the bottom of the picture there is a steady decrease in both social status and physical size (except in the case of the degraded castes, Bhatu, Habru and Dom). Chattris, Muslims (although not within the fold of Hindu society) and Agharia have a high social position below the Brahmans. They resemble the Brahmans to some extent in physical appearance Then come the Ahirs, the Kurmis and the Artisans who all belong to the very numerous and widely scattered middle layers of Hindu society have

³ *Sankhya*, Vol. 9, Pt. 11, pp. 117, 118. Oct. 1948.

medium or moderate value of all characters under review

... They have a somewhat narrow nasal breadth (resembling the upper castes) which differentiates them distinctly from the tribes (the A-cluster)

..... The Chamars, traditionally leather workers are an extremely numerous and widespread caste at the bottom of the orthodox Hindu society. They may possibly be included in the fringe of the above cluster

..... At the bottom of the picture and at the lowest end of the social scale come the cluster consisting of the modern representatives of the aboriginal tribes. They all have a short stature and are of small physical build with the shortest height, small or smallest nasal length and smallest nasal depth but the widest nasal breadth.....

..... The groups considered so far form a kind of main sequence in which there is close association between social status and resemblance to the Brahman in physical appearance.”⁴

Thus according to the above survey there is in the U.P. a correlation existing between social status and physical characteristics or between ritual status and physical characteristics.

West Bengal by Majumdar and Rao

The area surveyed was actually undivided Bengal. The techniques used were the same as used in the U.P. survey. The physical elements existing in the population, according to the surveyors — Majumdar and Rao, were the same as in the U.P. and Gujarat (cf. later). They consisted of Mediterranean, Mongoloid and proto-Australoid or Vedoid types. As in the U.P. and Gujarat most of the tribal and semi-tribal groups were found to form a cluster distinct from the higher castes of Brahman, Baidya, Kayastha and Baisya. In the intermediate rungs of the caste ladder there are some castes which tend to be nearer the higher castes and others nearer the tribal elements. It appears, as in the Uttar Pradesh that elements of this intermediate group are more intermixed with the tribal groups than the higher castes in general. At the same time they also have definite affinities with the upper castes.

⁴ *Sankhya*, Vol. 9 Pt. II, pp. 117 seq. Oct. 1948.

⁵ *Sankhya*, Vol. 19, Pts. II and III, June, 1958.

When, however, one makes a more detailed breakdown certain interesting features emerge. Thus the Kayasthas of Dacca are closer to the Brahmans of Dacca than to the Kayasthas of other districts. In these districts again the Brahman, Baidya, Kayastha and Baisya cluster in the same way among themselves as the Dacca group. The existence of such strong regional affinities raises the question whether or not these castes arose from a common group by splitting away. We shall note a similar state of affairs in Gujerat and Maharashtra later. In the Kangra Hills of East Punjab individuals and groups were and still are appointed to different castes by the secular power. According to some writers, like Ibbetson, the Kangra Hills possess a caste system which is somewhat archaic with features similar to the caste system of the Punjab in general prior to the Muslim invasions. In the Kangra Hills hypergamous intercaste marriages prevail, people have greater occupational mobility and castes are raised and lowered in status by decree of the secular power. The anthropometric data available about these upper castes in Bengal, Gujerat and Maharashtra may indicate a similar state of affairs in the past. The Muslims of Bengal again are not a homogenous group, there often being considerable differences among them. The Muslims of Dacca, for instance, are fairly close to the Brahmans and Kayasthas of that region. The Muslims of Nadia, Burdwan and Faridpur on the other hand appear more similar to the local Namasudras. One may speculate that as Dacca was a seat of Moghul power there may have been conversions to Islam from the higher castes, as seems to have happened in the U.P. In certain areas of North Bengal the Muslims are similar to their co-religionists of Bihar across the border.

The existence of affinities between different castes of a particular region and their relative differences with similar castes in other regions does not show that caste status is rigidly correlated with physical characteristics.

*Gujerat by Majumdar and Kishen*⁶

Dr. D. N. Majumdar and Mr. K. Kishen conducted a survey of blood groups, a serological survey of castes and tribes in Greater

⁶ Majumdar and Kishen : *Race Realities in Cultural Gujerat*.

Gujarat in 1946, using the techniques that were used in the U.P. survey, cited before. Summing up this serological survey they said: "It is indeed doubtful if we can say much about the racial distance of the tribes and castes of cultural Gujarat on serological evidence alone."⁷

Majumdar and Sen also conducted an anthropometric survey in the same area on the lines of the U.P. survey in 1946, covering about 3000 people. They took 13 measurements which included items like Maximum Head Length and Head Breadth, Nasal length, Nasal Breadth, Total Facial Length, Sitting Height, Weight etc. Summarising this survey they wrote: "The data presented in the table suggest the following clusters of the whole material. The order in which the clusters are presented is also the order of their location on the ethnic scale.

(a) A group of closely associated tribes—Bhangi, Bhil and others form a compact cluster

(b) A second cluster is formed by the Koli, the Artisans, the Macchi-Kharwa and a Miscellaneous group called one.

(c) A third constellation, having no connection with the first two, is formed by the 9 castes—Kunbi, Pattidar, Sunni Bara, Luhana, Memon, Khoja, Rajput, Nagar Brahman, Audich Brahman and Oswal Jain which, though distinctly different, appear to be nearer on the ethnic scale to the cluster formed by the Koli, Artisan, Miscellaneous Group one and the Macchi-Kharwa than to the Bhil, Bhangi etc. According to the surveyors Gujarat is an area with a considerably homogeneous population (op. cit. p. 10). There is, however, a certain differentiation of physical types between the top castes and the bottom, but as in the U.P. and elsewhere these differences may have had a significance in historical times, but there is nothing to indicate that at present they serve as a conscious factor in assigning caste status. These physical differences also may provide a clue as to the way these areas were settled by the farming, the associated and upper castes. The latter probably occupied the area and converted local tribal people into menials. The similarity in physical characteristics of the so-called clean castes may indicate that caste specialisation and differentiation were much greater later on than in the initial periods of settlement. The same can be probably said of the

⁷ Op cit. p. 11.

settlement of Bengal and Maharashtra (cf. later). Such a stratification would constitute the first level of political power in Indian rural society. Further differentiation would create dominant and upper caste groups on the one hand and middle groups on the other. This is a process which can be seen to be taking place, for instance, among the Pathans of the Swat Valley, where the local conquered peasantry now occupies the lowest position in society. Among the conquering⁸ Pathans, however, a higher status group of Maliks and Khans is forming. The similarity between farming Jats and overlord Rajputs in Northern India⁹ and between agricultural¹⁰ Kunbis and dominant Marathas has been pointed out by a number of writers. We shall discuss these points later, when we discuss dominant castes."

*Maharashtra by Karve and Dandekar*¹¹

Using less refined techniques (according to their own statements) than those used by Mahalanobis, Rao and Majumdar, Karve and Dandekar have conducted a survey of Maharashtra. Broadly, their findings are these:- "The Mahars and Mangs, the two great untouchable castes, stand so near each other that they can be easily conceived as originally one people split into two owing to occupational differences." In each sub-region the local Brahman group conforms with the other higher groups e.g. the Madhyandin Brahman and the Maratha resemble each other; the Brahmans and the agriculturists of the central region are indistinguishable. Professor Ghurye¹² analysed the same problem—the correlation between caste status and physical characteristics. His conclusion were that such a correlation holds good only in the U.P. and Bihar, but not in the Punjab, Bengal, Orissa, western and southern India, i.e. in the major areas of the country. The main data available to him were those from Risley's survey, which, as noted before, has been criticised as inadequate. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that these results do not contradict those of the later surveys.

⁸ F. Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, London, p. 220 sq. University of London, the Athlone Press, 1959.

⁹ D. Ibbetson, *Report on the Punjab Census, 1881*, p. 220.

¹⁰ R. V. Russel, *Castes and Tribes of the Central Provinces*, Vol. 14, p. 201.

¹¹ Karve and Dandekar, *Anthropometric Measurements of Maharashtra*.

¹² Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p. 105; Appendices A and B; 31; 136-139 etc.

In south India, unfortunately there has been no modern large-scale survey of the type conducted in the U.P., Gujarat and Bengal. Ghurye used data supplied by Risley, Thurston and various Census Reports in an attempt to find correlations. We can report his findings as a matter of interest. Here also he finds no correlation between caste status and physical characteristics. In arranging his scale Ghurye puts the Caucasoid type at the top of the scale and those with the broadest noses at the bottom. His results can be set down in the following tabular form:-

In the various regions of South India, according to the data of Risley and Thurston, the physical ranking of castes as well as the general social ranking was as follows (in order of precedence established by Ghurye):-

TELUGU REGION		TAMILNAD	
<i>Physical rank</i>	<i>Social rank</i>	<i>Physical rank</i>	<i>Social rank</i>
Kapu	Brahman	Ambattan	Brahman
Sale	Komati	Vellala	Idaiyan
Golla	Golla	Idaiyan	Vellala
Mala	Kapu	Agamudaiyan	Agamudaiyan
Madiga	Sale	Tamil Brahman	Palli
Togate	Mala	Palli	
KANARESE REGION.		MALAYALI REGION.	
Smarta	Brahmans	Tiyyan	Nambudri
Brahman			Brahman
Bant	Vakkaliga	Nambudri	
Billava	Toreya	Brahman	Nayar
		Nayar	Tiyyan
Mandya	Kurumba	Cheruman	Cheruman
Brahman			
Vakkaliga	Bedar		
Ganiga	.....	
Panchala,	Holeya etc.		
Kuruba, Holeya,			
Deshasth			
Brahman,			
Toreya, Bedar			
etc.			

Whether we accept results based on Risley's findings or not, the available data shows that except for the U.P. correlations between caste status and physical characteristics do not exist in Bengal, Gujerat and Maharashtra. The next point to consider is that even if such correlations did exist, are they used by people to evaluate caste status of persons? The answer here is a 'No'. For in the numerous surveys of castes and tribes of all the different states of India there is perhaps not even one group found, which ascribes its status as due to its racial origin as such. The Gujars of the Punjab, who, Tod thinks, came from Central Asia in the early years of the Christian era, regard themselves as descended from the moon. The Barhai or the carpenter caste of the U.P. claim descent from the god Viswamitra.¹³ The Agarwalas of Bihar from Raja Agra Sena.¹⁴ The stone-cutting Salats of Bombay from Brahmans.¹⁵ The instances can be multiplied. The accounts of origin generally fall under these categories: (1) from a sage e.g. the Punjab sweeping caste, the Chuhras claim descent from Balmik; (2) a mythical hero like Parasuram; (3) a Brahman or Rajput descent, but later degraded owing to an unfortunate incident; (4) from a God. It can hardly be said, then, that physical characteristics are used by people to evaluate caste status.

¹³ Crooke: *Caste and Tribes of Northern India, the Barhai*.

¹⁴ Risley: *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. 2, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Enthoven: *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, p. 316.

PROBABLE CONDITIONS IN WHICH INDIAN CASTE
SOCIETY EMERGED (I)

THERE IS, HOWEVER, a variant of the theory that physical characteristics and caste status are correlated. It admits that in general such correlations today are not found, nor do people use physical characteristics to evaluate caste status, but, this theory maintains that originally such a correlation did exist, because caste status originally arose from the conquest of certain racial or ethnic groups by others. These theories can be described as 'conquest' theories of the origin of certain types of societies. With respect to Indian society these theories contain a certain amount of truth. But Indian society is a very complex society, and we shall show that such theories greatly oversimplify matters to the extent of rendering much unexplainable. Such theories raise the question of the conditions in which types of societies like Indian societies arose. A discussion of the probable conditions will help to deepen understanding also.

According to such ideas the conquerors debarred the conquered from certain occupations, forced them to take up others and prevented inter-marriage with them. There is ample evidence that such have from time to time taken place in India. Outside India also a large number of such conquests have taken place. How often have they led to caste societies of the *Hindu* type? It is conceded that there might be various types of caste societies.

First, we must clarify the question whether it is legitimate to test a social theory in this way. Here we have a hypothesis that a caste society of a certain type arises only out of conquest by racially dissimilar people. We look for examples of such conquests among agricultural and pastoral societies. There are a number of such societies. We note whether as a result caste societies of the Indian type have emerged or not. As is well known science tests hypotheses wherever possible by experiment or observational data. The use of such a method is useful for our purpose where observational data is available.

We used the term 'a Hindu type of caste society'. Let us re-state our description of it. We can start with Nadel's definition of caste society as "the segmentation of society in rigid fashion, the various segments being based on descent and permitting no mobility or inter-marriage; a differentiation which goes hand in hand with social inequality, that is with an unequal share in existing benefits and unequal claim to status and esteem; we mean also an inequality which is not only *de facto* but *de jure*, it is as it should be, so that the lower castes are despised, not only unhappily underprivileged; they bear a stigma, apart from being unfortunate. Conversely the higher castes are not merely entitled to the possession of coveted privileges but are also in some way exalted and endowed with a higher dignity."¹ His definition does not contradict the other definitions given in the opening chapters. If we adopt this definition we would see that certain societies in Africa can also be called caste societies, having the above features in common with Hindu society. There are, however, certain differences. For the present these differences can be summed up in the statement that in Hindu society there exist a whole range of practices based on notions of purity and impurity, of different degrees of perfection existing among different castes, *which do not exist in some of these African societies*. (For the present we shall leave out the complex development of philosophy and art in Indian society which exist on top of this.) Let us take some specific examples. Apart from modern states like South Africa, we can point to a number of features of caste-like societies in different regions of Africa. Comparisons with tribal and near-tribal societies would be more apt as they would be parallel more closely to the state of affairs that existed in those historical periods when caste society is supposed to have emerged in India. Such a state of affairs can still be found in modern times in Africa. We may cite two cases of 'conquest societies':-

(1) The kingdom of Nupe in Northern Nigeria with a population of a little under half-a-million is ruled by a hereditary aristocracy, a racially different group called the Fulani, which had conquered it. All the vacant and conquered land is divided

¹ S. F. Nadel, *Caste and Government in Primitive Society*, *Journal of the Anthropological Society*, p. 16, 1950.

among the members of this aristocracy, who, however, do not farm themselves, but control this main resource of the country, letting it out to farmers and henchmen, free or otherwise. These followers form their armies. If by caste we mean the rigid and unalterable apportionment of social privileges on the grounds of descent, this social stratification is partly one of caste. The hereditary aristocracy has special titles, special legal and ceremonial privileges. Rigid rules of etiquette govern its relations with others. Until recently it alone provided the governors of provinces and tax farmers.

Below this hereditary nobility, which styles itself as 'the Sons of Kings' are two orders of nobility—one which produces the war leaders, the other which produces the civil administrators. These groups, though distinguished from the commoners by badges of rank, privilege and ownership of land, are composed both of men of Fulani and Nupe descent. But the hereditary aristocracy, 'the Sons of Kings' do not permit officially this infiltration into their ranks, and though they have adopted the offspring of mixed marriages the myth of racial purity is maintained and elevated almost to a dogma.²

(2) A second example can be taken from East Africa, among a people of non-negroid stock, numbering about 60,000 on the borders of Sudan and Eritrea, called the Beni-Amer. They are divided into a number of united agnatic lineages. The senior lineage provides the King. Below the Beni-Amer is a numerous subject population of the serfs, the unfree, without legal protection and until recently practically propertyless. They perform all the menial work. The main form of wealth in the country is cattle and camels which are owned by this Beni-Amer aristocracy, whose only pursuit used to be war. No intermarriage is permitted between the two strata. In the sense that this stratification does not permit of mobility of individuals from the lower to the upper strata it can be called a caste and not merely a class structure.

What are then the points of similarities between these two caste systems and the Hindu caste system? All three societies are rigidly segmented and these segments are based on descent. Intermarriage or mobility of occupation is not permitted. There

² Nadel, *op. cit.*

is a differentiation of occupations which goes hand in hand with social inequality, an inequality in the share of existing benefits, claims and esteem. The lower castes are despised. The higher castes elevated, endowed with a higher dignity. Here, however, the similarity ends. If the Beni-Amer lord eats with a serf he would lose prestige and status. If a high caste Hindu ate with a low caste he may not only lose prestige and status but would also suffer pollution including a contamination of the spirit.³ Nadel, who has made a study of these similarities and differences finds that these concepts of purity and impurity, of different degrees of perfection, existing among different Hindu castes, do not exist in the above two African conquest type societies. The inference would then seem to be that these features of purity and impurity among the Hindu arise from a set of circumstances different from the fact of mere conquest. Conquest, he says, is but one of the circumstances from which the Hindu caste system arose.

We have also to consider the fact that stratification into classes may arise by the process of internal differentiation into classes, which may in turn develop the characteristics of caste in restricting occupational mobility and intermarriage e.g. among the Swat Pathans the wealthier and more powerful have differentiated themselves away from the others into a Khan group and allow only hypergamous marriage with other Pathans, whilst marriage with non-Pathans is totally ruled out.⁴ Ibbetson thinks that the Jats and the Rajputs originally came from the same stock in north-western India.⁵ Enthoven has the same view with respect to the Marathas and Kunbis, who frequently intermarry.⁶ If we term this kind of differentiation a horizontal division of society, then we can call the differentiation of social tasks, the division of labour, 'vertical division'. Nadel points out that in Hindu society there is both horizontal stratification of hereditary classes into castes; and also the fact of mutual interdependence among the people who perform separate social tasks, a differentiation of tasks associated with mystic notions of pollution and ritual avoidance.

³ Nadel, *op. cit.*

⁴ Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, Ch. 3 pp. 19, 20

⁵ Ibbetson, *op. cit.* pp. 220 sq.

⁶ Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes of Bombay* on Marathas and Kunbis pp. 23-25.

What then are the conditions for the emergence of the *Hindu* type of caste society? He suggests these prior conditions: (1) a differentiation of social tasks, which is permanent and rigid, and which makes the different segments of the society interdependent. In other words there must be a rigid division of labour, (2) this division of labour must be sanctioned by religion conceived of as pre-ordained and invested with mystic meaning. The allocated tasks themselves may be of a mystic nature—command over rain or disease or some rare skill like that of working iron; (3) these tasks though vital for the welfare of society must involve some attitude of fear and awe, or some belief that the powers and skills in question go together with unclean, spiritually degrading qualities; or with qualities which, though the reverse of spiritual degradation, are taboo—a matter of dread because of their very purity.

In India the Brahmins are necessary for all rituals at birth, marriage, funerals and so on—for the clean castes at least. This gives him a position of power in society. On the other hand, as Gandhi has pointed out, the whole system also revolves upon the existence of the lower castes as well. The Brahmin must have cleanliness but cannot sweep. He needs the smiths and the weavers as much as they need his service at rituals. This is interdependence coupled with ritual avoidance, with mystic sanctions behind it.

Can one find this social interdependence and the mystic sanctions accompany it elsewhere, in other societies? In Nupe society and among the Beni-Amer there is a measure of interdependence but it is, as Nadel says, one-sided. The aristocrats cannot do without the labour of the farmers and the craftsmen but the many rebellions in these subject societies indicate that they do not reciprocate this sentiment. Nor is there much of mystic avoidance, of mystic interdependence among these sections of such societies either.

Nadel⁷ points out, however, that there are societies in Africa, which though far removed from the complexity and the philosophical concepts of Indian Hindu society, nevertheless do exhibit mystic interdependence as well as mystically sanctioned inequality,

⁷ Nadel, *op. cit.*

degradation, even untouchability. There is for instance the Tire Tribe. The Tire have not the social stratification which exists in India, nor the extensive occupational differentiation and integration which is to be seen in India. They have, however, certain practices which throw light on the Pollution Concept. The tribe numbers about 10,000 people and are divided into a number of descent lines or clans, each tracing its descent back to a common ancestor. Each clan observes certain food taboos and ritual observances which vary characteristically from clan to clan. All are farmers and owners of livestock, and unlike Indian society, there is no differentiation in ordinary occupation. There is, however, one important differentiation—in ritual rights and obligations. Each clan is believed to possess certain supernatural powers peculiar to it, which is possessed by no other clan and which enable it to control a part of the universe. This control is exercised not only for its own benefit, but for the benefit of the tribe at large and on its behalf. Thus the clans control in this fashion rain, the fertility of the soil, the animal world, health and disease and so on. These supernatural powers, which each clan possesses, is regarded not only as a privilege, but its exercise is regarded as a duty, its contribution to the common need. The clans are thus aware of their mutual interdependence in this supernatural sense.

We have, then, here some of the characteristics of caste: differentiation of rights and obligations and the conception of mutual interdependence of a mystic and pre-ordained kind. In two Tire clans, however, there is to be seen another feature—the aspect of a stigma attaching to the people in question. One of these clans is believed to possess the power to control storms and to cure or ward off lunacy, tasks beneficial to the whole community. But for this very power the others fear and avoid them. Smiths are another category who are widely avoided e.g. the Somalis,⁸ the Masai,⁹ many Abyssinians fear and avoid them.¹⁰ Among the Masai every clan has its smiths; but there is one clan the Kupuyoni to whom most men of this class belong. The other Masai do not marry the daughters of the smiths, for it is not considered correct. The smiths marry among themselves. In

⁸ R. Burton, *First Footsteps*, p. 33.

⁹ A. C. Hollis, *The Masai*, pp. 330, 331.

¹⁰ W. C. Harris, *The Highlands of Aethiopia*, Vol. 2, p. 295.

Hindu society the attitude towards smiths is similar. The smith, for instance, is avoided in the Kangra Hills, and Kangra according to writers like Ibbetson, Barnes, Lyall has a more archaic form of Hindu society than other areas. Here there is a degree of occupational mobility, castes and groups change their social status instead of endogamy, caste hypergamy prevails. (cf. Ibbetson, *op. cit.* pp. 175, 180). Among the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush smiths are regarded as dangerous and unclean and are not allowed to hold any office. The Kafirs until recently had rituals, which had resemblances to some Vedic rites, and even worshipped a god called Inthra or Indra. They belong to the Dardic language group of the Indo-Iranian language.¹¹ According to Biddulph these sentiments still prevailed among the majority of the peoples of the Hindu Kush, in spite of their having become Muslims. He gives an instance of how in the village of Dah former black-smiths are regarded as untouchables by the Shins and Brokpas.¹² The Shins have a peculiar taboo about cows and cow's milk, neither of which they will touch. So strong is this taboo that they are often called the 'cow people' by other local elements. In this respect their attitude towards cows is in some ways the reverse of that of the orthodox Hindus.

At the other corner of India, the north-east, in Assam, Hutton¹³ points out how among the Naga tribes each village is an independent political unit, but there is very often to be seen a distribution by villages of certain occupations. Thus some villages make pots but do not weave cloth, others weave or engage in smith's work—the one village bartering its products with its neighbours, when not prevented from doing so by mutual hostilities, inspite of differences of language, custom and sometimes perhaps of race between one village and another. The area again is one where neither Hinduism nor Islam has uptill now penetrated. Adoption of the craft of another village is taboo and might affect the fruits and the crops because it is an offence to the ancestral spirits. In these areas, however, there is generally no taboo either on commensality as such or on intermarriage but there are certain food taboos whereby certain food are peculiar to certain exogamous clans.

¹¹ C. Robertson, *Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, pp. 100, 101.

¹² Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Kush*, p. 52.

¹³ Hutton, *Caste in India*, pp. 182-4.

Slater has pointed out how caste is stronger in south India than in the north or the west¹⁴ and suggests a local, pre-Aryan growth.

Gilbert¹⁵ has pointed out that early Tamil literature refers to different peoples living in the different geographical areas—the Peravdar lived on the coast by fishing, the Vellalar cultivated irrigated land and the Keralar drier land, the Idayar and the Ayar herded in the uplands and so on. This ecological differentiation of early groups offers a possible basis for caste differentiation when economic ties began to develop between them.

Whether caste society in north and north-western India is pre-Indo-Iranian or pre-Aryan or not, (there is no direct evidence available of caste in the Indus civilisation), the Indo-Iranians, as Hutton says, had notions of magic, mana, taboo and soul substances in connection with a hereditary division of labour. Thus Parsi priests eat no food cooked and drink no water drawn by anyone outside the priestly clans when they are in a state of purity.¹⁶ Examining ancient Iranian society we find certain parallels to Hindu society. There is a hereditary endogamous priesthood at the top of the social scale; a social division corresponding to the four Hindu varnas; endogamous marriage within the non-priestly classes and certainly within the priestly classes. Among the Parsis till recent times, the priest imbued with the idea of preserving their supremacy in ritual status derived from Zoroastrian times, did not give their daughters in marriage to lay Parsis, and very rarely accepted daughters from them. Piddington¹⁷ points out that there is an almost universal tendency among aristocracies, wherever they are to be found, to become endogamous. It is reported that King Ardeshir, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty of Iran, made these professions—of the priest, warrior, cultivator and merchant, artisan etc., well nigh hereditary (Enthoven, op. cit. p. 202). In ancient Iran the priests were called Athravan (cfr Vedic 'Atharvan'), the military aristocracy

¹⁴ Slater quoted in Hutton, op. cit. p. 152.

¹⁵ Gilbert, *Peoples of India*, p. 29, Smithsonian Institute, War Studies No. 18. Washington 1944.

¹⁶ Hutton op. cit. p. 188. Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, pp. 201-203. Dastur Peshton's Dinkard Vol. 2, p. 91., quoted in Enthoven op. cit. p. 203.

¹⁷ Piddington, *Introduction to Social Anthropology*, Vol. 1, p. 193.

Kshatriya, Kshatra, Kshathia; the cultivators, husbandmen, Vac-triya; and later a fourth group composed of artisans etc., the Huity. The parallels to Vedic society are quite obvious. Stratification among the ancient Iranians and for that matter, by implication, among the Vedic peoples appears to have primarily developed out of internal social differentiation, and did not arise directly from the conquest of outside ethnic groups. Even when such conquests take place by tribal or semi-tribal peoples (i.e. societies which are relatively undifferentiated), the process is more complex than has sometimes been assumed. We can examine such cases later in more detail. But it is sufficient to remark here that when the conquering tribe settles down, its homogeneity breaks up and privileged groups begin to emerge. We refer here particularly to the conquest of agricultural regions. Apart from the emergence of privileged groups there is increasing division of labour and social functions, which as we saw may be backed by mystical taboos and avoidances. The evidence of such ritual sanctions to back up elementary division of social functions, which we have shown in the foregoing pages, is quite considerable. They are a fact. We also examined some typical conquest states such as the Beni-Amer and the Fulani and found, that whereas Hindu society has parallel features in stratification, neither of the former possess the mystic interdependence and avoidance accompanying the division of social functions, which are so prominent a feature of Hindu caste society. This indicates that an extremely complex society, like Hindu caste society, could not, in all probability, have emerged from a single set of circumstances like that of conquest. But it could arise, as Max Weber remarked, because of a number of conditions operating conjointly. This included conquest, division of labour backed by mystical sanctions, notions of taboo, of purity and impurity, social stratification etc.¹⁸ Kroeber also says:¹⁹ "The history of Indian caste is extremely complex and its causes manifold. Any attempt to explain the system on the basis of a single factor may therefore be attractive to those who like simple formulae, but is foredoomed to partiality and unsoundness."

¹⁸ M. Weber, *Religion of India*, p. 130.

¹⁹ A. C. Kroeber, "Caste" in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3-4, p. 255.

What happens then to the argument that Hindu caste society has developed out of conquest and hence caste status has been determined by the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered? Such a theory cannot stand. There are too many things it cannot explain. If a society like Hindu society could be shown to have arisen out of a complex of conditions and not only the fact of conquest, then the significance of any correlation between status and physical characteristics is weakened considerably. In most cases it has been shown that such correlations do not exist, and hence one must state, where such correlations exist, they are to that extent weakened.

Chapter 5

PROBABLE CONDITIONS IN WHICH INDIAN CASTE SOCIETY EMERGED (II)

THESE EARLY DIVISION of social functions, specialisation, took place in a society whose system of ideas were permeated with notions of magic, mana, taboo and spiritism. In such an environment it is not strange that such notions would be used to reinforce this growing labour specialisation. How consciously this was done is for the present irrelevant. But apart from these mystic sanctions backing the division of social functions and their integration (e.g. witness the role of untouchable castes in important rituals, including life cycle rituals almost everywhere in Hindu India), apart from this aspect, there is the further fact of stratification in the Hindu caste system and in the Indian caste system in general. This is the aspect with which the phenomenon of the dominant caste is associated with. Hindu caste society, as has been remarked before, is not a society of equal castes. How has this inequality arisen? To comprehend more fully the complex of conditions, as has been said, out of which Indian caste society arose, it is necessary to throw more light on the growth of this stratification. This has to be shown not in the abstract, but in the light of the probable conditions that obtained in its emergence, as well as explaining the various special features of the Hindu caste system.

Generally speaking stratification is supposed to develop either as a result of internal social differentiation or as the result of conquest. Indian experience seems to suggest also a third — conquest followed by internal social differentiation. On the whole the bulk of sociological and historical evidence pertaining to different parts of India seem to indicate that (1) stratification generally developed as the result of internal social differentiation (*cfr.* later Marathas and Kunbis, Jats and Rajputs in chapter on Dominant Castes); (2) of conquest followed by internal social differentiation; (3) or conquest by a social group which is already stratified e.g. the Mughal conquests of Babar, Humayun and

Akbar, who came with their armies from a highly stratified and complex society.

The most desirable way to study this growth of stratification would be to study actual societies in the process of acquiring stratification—a field study, so to say. The next step would be to compare this data with the historical and other sociological evidence that we have with respect to India. Fortunately such studies are possible for India.

Northern and particularly North-western India (today Pakistan), is a useful area to start such a study. This is the area where the earliest Indian cities developed. It was the area first settled by the Vedic peoples. The process of invasion and settlement has been frequently repeated since by peoples from Central Asia (Huns, Turks, Mongols etc.) A fairly considerable body of historical and sociological data is available. Such a study may throw light on the development of society not only in the north-west, but in north India in general. Similar studies have to be made with respect to the western, southern and eastern regions of the country, for which a considerable study of local or regional history is needed. At present we shall confine ourselves to the north-western regions.

In the introduction we stated that when we talked of castes, what was being referred to was actually the sub-caste, which is in actual fact the unit which tends to follow hereditary, specialised occupations, and which is commensal and endogamous. However, as the repeated use of the word sub-caste is clumsy, we preferred to use the word caste in its place. Sub-castes are the 'jatis' of modern Indian usage. Indian society today is characterised by a multiplicity of 'jatis', most of which are occupational. The Brahmans themselves are split up into a host of sub-castes also. In different areas and regions there are different dominant castes. This may be described as the 'jati' type of the caste system in general. There are of course regional variations. Thus the Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, parts of Madhya Bharat and eastern Punjab can be characterised as one such region. The general dominant castes in this area are the Chhatttri or Rajputs, sometimes Jats and Brahmans. The Brahman, however, generally speaking does not have the secular power

that the south Indian Brahman often has. There is a multiplicity of artisan sub-castes which shows a considerable division of labour. One of the large depressed castes in this area are the Chamars. There are relatively large mercantile castes whose position in the ritual scale is next to that of the Brahman and the Chchattri. If we now compare this system with the four-caste system mentioned in the later Vedic literature, the differences would no doubt be noticeable. For one thing the number of sub-divisions is much more considerable, and it is very difficult to fit in many sub-castes in the tight categories of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. Today in practice the four-caste system does not operate. It is used as a conceptual scheme. But those categorised as Brahmans do not marry or interdine with other Brahman sub-castes necessarily, and the same holds true for all the other sub-castes, who have been characterised as one of the other three varnas. The four-caste system today is not operational.

Now we know that we do not come across references to social stratification, classes, varnas or castes in the earliest Vedic literature. Later, we come across the four-caste system. But before we put the question 'how did this change from the four-caste to the multi-caste or the 'jati' system take place, let us restate the statement that was made about the four-caste system not being in operation today. It is, but in a relatively few areas. And in a few other areas we get interesting types of social systems, which appear to be intermediate between the four caste system and the full fledged 'jati' system. We are dealing with the Indian sub-continent. These areas lie mainly in the different regions of the Punjab and what was known as the North-West Frontier Province.

In the Punjab apart from caste based on occupation, two different types of caste are found: (1) the first is based on what may be called 'the community of blood'. D. Ibbetson calls this the 'tribal' type of caste.¹ An example is that of the Pathan or the Biloch. Here the fiction which unites the caste or the social group is the myth of common descent from a traditional ancestor. But even if the common ancestor is a myth, there is a real bond

¹ Ibbetson, *op. cit.* pp. 176-7.

of common origins, common habitat, customs, language and culture which holds these peoples together. The Pathans and the Biloch, like similar tribes elsewhere, have affiliated tribes of foreign origin and whether or not these latter maintain a tradition of a separate origin, they are nevertheless recognized for all practical purposes as Pathan or Biloch.

(2) The second type of caste is the 'trades guild' type of caste, which is based on the principle of the trades guild pure and simple and not on hereditary birth. Such castes are to be found generally in the larger towns, where it seems numerous artisans attracted from outside, in the absence of an operating 'jati' system of caste, have formed these purely trade bodies.

Returning to the 'tribal' type of caste we find it operating not only in the Frontier Province, but also in areas of the western Punjab. Here men of different castes—Pathans, Biloch, Rajputs or their sub-groups like the Janjuas and Khokkars, Gakkars, Awans etc., engaged in different occupations, except those socially regarded by themselves as degrading, like scavenging. But, here, even if, for instance a Pathan were to become a scavenger, his degradation would be immediate and individual, and not hereditary or ritual.²

The difference between this type of caste and type that prevails, for instance, in the Uttar Pradesh is quite clear. In the pre-partition Punjab the change from one type to the other took place with some suddenness about the meridian of Lahore. Here the great rivers enter the fertile zone and the arid grazing grounds of the West give place to the arable plains of the East. The sub-montane zone retains its social as well as its physical characteristics much further west than do the plains which lie below it, and here the restrictions of the eastern type of caste can hardly be said to cease till the Salt Range is crossed. As mentioned above, it is well known that the agricultural fertility of the Eastern plains, and to a lesser extent that of the sub-montane Himalayan regions, is more than that of the drier Western districts and the Frontier Province. This also parallels the difference in social formation. The following figures throw further light on these differences.

² Ibbetson, *op. cit.* pp. 176-177.

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL, INDUSTRIAL, PROFESSIONAL
AND COMMERCIAL POPULATION IN THE PUNJAB AND THE N.W.F.P.
IN 1901**

<i>Area</i>	<i>Ag. Pop.</i>	<i>Density per sq. mile</i>	<i>Industrial pop.</i>	<i>Profes- sional pop.</i>	<i>Commercial pop.</i>
E. Plains	6,554,063	314.2	2,491,095	277,665	367,275
Himalayan	1,344,834	76.7	166,327	21,118	24,505
Sub- Himalayan	3,856,722	300.2	1,313,519	166,050	203,726
North-West dry area.	3,524,427	95.9	1,227,522	107,462	165,158

(Source: *Census of the Punjab and N.W.F.P. of 1901*)

On the one hand you have the Eastern and sub-montane zones, and on the other you have the Himalayan and the dry Western zone. The disparity between the two regions not only in the density of population, but also in their numbers of industrial, commercial and professional populations is great. It is true the categories of industrial and professional include factory workers and modern professionals also. But in 1901 factory workers comprised only 1.39 per cent of the total number of those classified as industrial workers and those whom we could call artisans, comprised 98.61 per cent in the Punjab and the N.W.F.P. This disparity emerges more clearly when we compare the number of artisans per 1000 of the population. Here we deal with artisans only and factory workers are not included:

<i>Area.</i>	<i>Blacksmith, Carpenter and Potter castes. (per 1000 of pop.)</i>
E. Plains	62
Sub-Himalayan	64.4
Hill States	34
W. Punjab	57
N.W.F.P.	30

(Source: *Ibbetson, Report on Punjab Census 1881, Abstract 102 p. 327.*)

The contrast becomes still more illuminating when we compare ratios of miscellaneous artisans:

<i>Area</i>	<i>Miscellaneous Artisans castes (per 1000 of the pop.).</i>
E. Plains	23
Sub-Himalayan	18
Hill States	3
W. Punjab	11.5
N.W.F.P.	7.6

(Source : *op. cit.* Abstract 105 p. 334).

When we compare the mercantile castes, the situation seems to be obscured by the fact that after the establishment of the British administration in Western Punjab and the N.W.F.P. these areas became important military areas. This seems to have attracted a large number of commercial elements — contractors, traders, shopkeepers etc. Thus per 1000 of the population the mercantile castes numbered 65 in the E. Plains; in W. Punjab, 63.5; in the N.W.F.P. 74; and in the Hill States, 18. If, however, we leave the military areas out we can compare the 65 of the E. Plains with the 18 of the Hill States. (cf. Ibbetson, *op. cit.* Abstract 91, p. 292).

This kind of comparative study can be carried on further. For our purpose the point seems to emerge quite clearly — the more fertile Eastern Plains and the sub-montane zones can support a larger population of craftsmen. Not only a larger population, but as the figures for miscellaneous artisans indicate a more varied population of craftsmen.

The growth of trade also seems to be associated with the increase in the numbers and the variety of the crafts. If we leave the figures for the military areas out, this also seems to be testified by the differences between the Hill States and the Eastern Plains in this respect. The same conclusions would hold for the growth of the specialist professionals also i.e. priests, scribes, accountants etc. though adequate figures for them for this period and area are somewhat lacking. (It appears that beggars and mendicants have been included in this category in Ibbetson's Report.)

The increasing sub-division of the crafts, their multiplication would tend to form associations of their own in the interests of

protecting and controlling the trade. In this respect it would be increasingly important to control the supply of skilled labour. The easiest step in this direction would be to make the crafts hereditary, and to prevent trade secrets going out—to impose restrictions on marriage and social life with outsiders. This is in essence what the 'jati' system does in comparison with the tribal type of caste. It would be instructive to examine a type of caste society which had not developed into the 'jati' type. The NWFP is predominantly Muslim and this might make comparisons difficult with Hindu 'jati' areas. From the figures of the artisan population above, we might infer that the Hill States might possess a type of caste society different from the full-fledged 'jati' type. This is actually the case. Ibbetson in his Report of 1880 finds this zone including Kangra and Kulu dissimilar in social formation to the Eastern Plains. This area, he states, is relatively lax in matters of caste as compared to the restrictions of the Eastern zone. Unlike the western areas it is not Muslim, as a matter of fact it is the most exclusively Hindu area of the province. Thus the relative laxity of the western areas in caste matters cannot be explained away only as due to Muslim influence. For in the areas, in which Islam has had practically no entrance, we find caste restrictions relatively loose, and caste divisions most general and indefinite as compared to the Eastern zone. "Here the oldest Rajput dynasties in the Punjab have preserved their supremacy unbroken up to within the last eighty years." (op. cit. p. 179).

Ibbetson is of the opinion that the main attack of the Muslim rulers had been against the Rajputs, who were their political rivals for power, and the removal of the Rajput elements helped to strengthen the influence of the Brahmans and Brahmanism in those areas, which came under Muslim rule. Thus he says "On the Indus we appear to have caste as it is under the Mahomedan, on the Jamna as it is under the Brahman, and in the Himalayas of the Kangra as it is under the Rajput." (ibid). This policy of the Muslim rulers has been one of the factors in the strengthening of what he calls Brahmanism. These factors played a part in its growth. Nevertheless, if we take notice of the statistics outlined above, there seem to have been additional, and, it seems, more powerful, factors working in the direction of the further sub-division of castes, the increasing ossification of caste boundaries and the

growth of caste restrictions. These, as suggested, were connected with the rise of new crafts and the spread of the old ones, the increase of competition among them, and ultimately with the growth of agricultural productivity. A good measure of the impact of Islam can be obtained from the fact that Islam originally was a democratic and casteless religion, nevertheless Islam in India and Pakistan is permeated with caste. Not only that, democratic tribes following the Islamic faith on settling down to agriculture on the North-West Frontier Province, have developed forms of caste society. This we shall examine in more detail later. The Brahmans may have utilised certain tendencies to foster more strict Brahmanical rules of caste, but they did not create what we might call their basis—these were the greater numbers of subdivisions of the artisan castes, increased commodity production, greater competition both for the market and for the patronage of the jajman, the growth of trade as evidenced by the greater concentration of the merchant castes in the Eastern zone as compared to Kangra. These are salient differences between an area like the Kangra and the Eastern Plains. This, as we shall see, has also been the general line of development of Indian society, though at present we are only examining North Indian society. About this last point Ibbetson has this interesting remark to make: "On the Indus we have the Sayyid and the Pir, the class of Ulemas or divines who take the place of the Brahman; the Pathan or Biloch as the case may be, who correspond with the Kshatriya; the so-called Jat, who is emphatically the 'people' or Vaishya in the old sense of the word and includes all the great mass of husbandmen of whatever caste they may be, Awans, Jats and the like, who cannot pretend to Kshatriya rank; the Kirar or trader of whatever caste, Baniya, Khattri, or Arora, corresponding with the later use of Vaishya; the artisan or Sudra; and the outcaste or Mlechcha. The two last classes have no generic names; but the three first correspond almost exactly with the Brahman, the Kshatriya and the Vaishya of the Middle Hindu scriptures, nor are the boundaries of these divisions more rigorously fixed than we find them in those scriptures." (ibid).

Let us discuss now some of the features of caste in the Kangra Hills: With respect to the state of caste distinctions in these hills, Ibbetson quotes Lyall as follows: "Till lately the

limits of caste do not seem to have been so immutably fixed in the hills as in the plains. The Raja was the fountain of honour, and could do as much as he liked. I have heard old men quote instances within their memory in which a Raja promoted a Girth to be a Rathi, and a Thakur to be a Rajput, for service done or money given; and at the present day the power of admitting back into caste fellowship persons put under a ban for some grave act of defilement is a source of income to the Jagirdar Rajas.

"I believe that Mr. Campbell, the present Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, has asserted that there is no such thing as a distinct Rajput stock: that in former times, before caste distinctions had become crystallized, any tribe or family whose ancestor or head rose to royal rank became in time Rajput.

"This is certainly the conclusion to which many facts point with regard to the Rajputs of these hills. Two of the old royal and now essentially Rajput families of this district, viz. Kotlehr and Bangahal, are said to be Brahmin by original stock. Mr. Barnes says that in Kangra the son of a Rajput by a low-caste woman takes place as a Rathi: in Seoraj and other places in the interior of the hills I have met families calling themselves Rajputs, and growing into general acceptance as Rajputs, in their own country at least, whose only claim to the title was that their father or grandfather was the offspring of a Kanetni by a foreign Brahmin. On the border line in the Himalayas, between Tibet and India proper, anyone can observe caste growing before his eyes; the noble is changing into a Rajput, the priest into a Brahmin, the peasant into a Jat; and so on down to the bottom of the scale. The same process was, I believe, more or less in force in Kangra proper down to a period not very remote from today" (ibid p. 175). And Ibbetson adds 'Kangra is of all parts of the Punjab the place in which the proudest and most ancient Rajput blood is to be found'. (ibid). Cunningham says in 'History of the Sikhs', "It may be assumed as certain that, had the conquering Mughals and Pathans been without a vivid belief and an organised priesthood, they would have adopted Vedism and become enrolled among the Kshatriyas or Rajput races." With respect to the Kangra Brahmans, Barnes quoted by Ibbetson (ibid) writes as follows:—

"The hills, as I have already stated, were the seats of petty independent princes, and in every principality the Brahmans are

arranged into classes of different degrees of purity. The Raja was always considered the fountain of all honour, and his classification made probably at the counsel of his religious advisers, was held binding upon the brotherhood. In these graduated lists no account was ever taken of the zamindar (farming) Brahmans as they were contemptuously styled—they were left to themselves in ignoble obscurity. Thus in the days of Raja Dharm Chand, the two great tribes of Kangra Brahmans—the 'Nagarkotias' (from Nagarkot, the ancient name of Kangra) and the 'Batehrus'—were formally sub-divided into clans. Of the Nagarkotias, Dharam Chand established thirteen different families....."

We find the Raja of Kangra bribed to elevate a caste in the social scale. "In the Hills the very stronghold at once of Rajput power and of Hinduism in its most primitive (?) form, we have the Brahman, but with a wide difference between the Brahman who prays and the Brahman who ploughs; we have the Rajput, a name strictly confined to the royal families and their immediate connections, and refused to such even of those as soil their hands with the plough; we have the great cultivating class, including the Thakars and Rathis of acknowledged and immediate Rajput descent who furnish wives even to the Rajputs themselves, and the Rawats, Kanets and Giraths of somewhat lower status; we have the Kirar or Mahajan, including not only traders, but all the Kayasthas and the clerkly class, and even Brahmans who take to these pursuits; we have the respectable artisan class, the carpenter, mason and watercarrier; and finally we have the Koli or Dagi, the outcast or Mlechchha of the hills. And from top to bottom of this social scale, no single definite line can be drawn which shall precisely mark off any one caste or grade from the one below it. Each one takes its wives from and eats with the one immediately below it, and the members of each can, and they occasionally do, rise to the one immediately above it." ³

With respect to the menial classes, Barnes in his *Kangra Report* writes:— "Those classes who are too proud or too affluent to plough and yet hold lands, generally entertain Kamas, or labourers from these outcast races, whose condition is almost analogous to that of slavery. He gets bread to eat, and a few clothes a year, and is bound to a life of thankless exertion. These castes

³ *Ibbetson, op. cit.* p. 180.

are always first impressed for 'begar' or forced labour, and, in additions to carrying loads, have to provide grass for the camp. In the hills the depression of these castes is more marked than I have observed elsewhere;—their manner is subdued and deprecatory; they are careful to announce their caste; and an accidental touch of their persons carries defilement, obliging the toucher to bathe before he can regain his purity. If any person of this caste has a letter to deliver, he will throw or deposit his charge on the ground, but not transmit it direct from hand to hand. He is not allowed to approach near, and in Court, when summoned, he will stand outside, not venturing unless bid to intrude within the presence. If encouraged to advance he does so with hesitation; while all the neighbours fall back to avoid the contamination of his touch. Under the rule of the Rajas they were subjected to endless restrictions. The women were not allowed to wear flounces deeper than four inches to their dress, nor to use the finer metal of gold for ornaments. Their houses were never to exceed a certain size, nor to be raised above one floor; the men were interdicted from wearing long hair; and in their marriages the bride was forced to go on foot, instead of riding in a 'jampan' or chair, as allowed to every other class. Certain musical instruments, such as the Duful or drum, and Nikara, or trumpet, were positively prohibited.

Thus the stringency of untouchability in North India in these parts did not derive from the impact of the Muslim invasion, but arose from the internal development of Hindu society.

Let us return to the western Punjab and the Frontier. We shall take the Swat valley as an example. The Pashto-speaking population of Swat takes its name from the Yusufzai tribes which at present dominate the area. The history of the area with its sequence of invasion, occupation by conquering groups gives us an interesting insight into the formation of a stratified society. This dominance was established in the 16th century, when the Yusufzai, themselves driven out of the Kabul valley, entered the plains of north Peshawar as conquerors. This was a repetition of a familiar pattern—the Vedic peoples overrunning the Harappans; the Parthians and the Sakas overrunning their descendants until the late middle ages. It was the same cycle of invasion, war and subjugation—the characteristic of the Koli Yuga as the Mahabharata has often stated. Tribes and peoples, who had participated

in the Mahabharata war, exist today bearing identical names often, such as the Afridi or Aperidi; the Kshattak who are today the Khattak; the Yusufzai, Mohmand and others who are descended from the Gandhari, the people of Gandhari, one-time queen of Hastinapur (Rfr. Dr. Bellew 'Races of Afghanistan'). The struggles of these peoples give us an insight into the struggles that took place in the period of the Mahabharata and the earlier struggles which are reported in the Rig Veda, such as the struggle of the Bharata tribe against the Purus, Anus, Druhyus, Yadus, Turvasas and the less known tribes of Alina, Paktha, Bhalanas, Siva and Visanin. (Rig Veda, 7.33. 2-5). This battle known as the Battle of the Ten Kings, it seems, was an attempt by the lesser Aryan tribes to maintain their separate existence, but they were completely routed by the Bharatas under their king Sudas on the Parusni.

These descendants of the Gandhari, the Yusufzai, wrested control of the Swat valley from the Swati. Some Swati became subject to the invaders; others fled across the Indus and here in the Hazara district today one can find their descendants established here as conquerors and landowners in their own turn.

The Swati, whom the Yusufzai replaced, had two hundred years ago themselves arrived in this area, pursuing the defeated Dilazak. Before the Dilazak, the Swat valley had been conquered by Mahmud of Ghazni, whom Pathan tradition holds as having first converted the Pathan people to Islam. At the time of Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion (c. 1000 A.D.) it was Hindu. In the early centuries of the Christian era, Swat was a fairly well-known centre of Buddhism. Archaeological excavations have yielded fairly extensive architectural ruins, Bactrian coins and sculpture in Gandhara style, suggesting the development and importance of Buddhist Swat and its sophistication.¹

In spite of these recurrent invasions, there are still in the uppermost section of the Swat valley populations who are non-Pathans and quite alien in language and culture to the rest of the territory. They speak two distinct languages, but are described together as Kohistani. Their languages belong to the Dardic group and is related to those of Kashmir and Gilgit. Stein claims that

¹ Cf. Aurel Stein: '*On Alexander's Track to the Indus.*' Macmillan, London, 1929.

a section of the old Buddhist population can be identified with them (*Ibid*). Their settlements are in valleys above 5,000 feet, where it is generally not possible to raise more than one cereal crop in the year, and this may have limited the line of Pathan encroachment.

The conquering Yusufzai sub-tribes owned the land, and it was decreed that it should be periodically re-allotted among the main branches of a sub-tribe after a specified number of years. In this system, the individuals do not own land in the sense of possessing rights to particular fields. What they do hold are shares in the total landed assets of the sub-tribe. The re-allotment involved wholesale migrations of the Yusufzai landowners over distances of thirty miles or so, every ten years. But the non-Yusufzai population never took part in these moves, thus demonstrating the fact that the dominant Yusufzai conquerors were the gentry and they were a parochial, population, serving a succession of different lords—the Sudras, so to say of a more modern period.

This division is further emphasised by restrictions on inter-marriage which lead to the development of social groups of a caste type. Pathans allow the marriage of equals, even when closely related. Like the Chhattri they encourage the giving of a daughter to a man of superior status and discourage the opposite. Thus landowners, as a group tend to marry endogamously, sometimes taking some women in marriage from some lower groups, but they will not give their daughters in marriage to inferiors.

In occupation the landowners are ideally warriors and administrators. The wealthier among them delegate all agricultural work to tenants. Men with small holdings do frequently work their own land, but are prevented by their ideals of pride and independence from becoming the tenants of others. These developments throw some light on the emergence of the Kshatriya and his separation from the Vaishya small landholder. Those Vaishyas who lost their land and affluence and became tenants sank in status, joined the ranks of the Sudras, who had originally been it seems a subjugated population (cf. later). Ibbetson also points out that Jats, who become affluent and powerful become Rajputs or Chhattri and vice versa, giving examples from different parts of the Punjab.⁵ In the same way the Maratha caste rose from the

⁵ Ibbetson: *Punjab Census*, 1881.

Kunbi farmer caste. With respect to the Yusufzai we have an example of a tribe without marked social classes, settling down on agricultural land and developing social classes.

The non-landowners follow very diverse occupations—they are mainly tenant farmers, labourers, blacksmiths, carpenters and other craftsmen, muleteers, shopkeepers, barbers, shepherds etc.

Their interpretation of Islam makes Swat Pathans believe that a variety of statuses depend on moral virtues like sanctity, piety, religious learning or dedication. But in Swat these statuses are inheritable and lead to numerous descent groups who claim high status, by virtue of descent from the Prophet, saints, scholars, devotees and others. The basis of their claim to status is, it can be seen, different from that of the warriors.

The attitudes towards intermarriage of landowners and persons of 'holy' status illustrate their respective views of their relative rank. Some 'holy' men assert that they are willing to marry the daughters of landowners but not give their own daughters in return. But landowners assert that only on the basis of reciprocity do they marry the daughters of the 'holy' groups. The 'holy' men serve as political mediators and, in return for their services, tribal segments of the Yusufzai occasionally grant prominent holy men permanent rights to land. Such plots are then withdrawn from the process of re-allotment and the area of the traditional 'shares' is to that extent reduced for the sub-tribe. In such ways and by conquest of marginal land from non-Yusufzai groups like the Kohistanis of the upper valley, these 'holy' descent groups often emerge as landowning groups of a different type from the Yusufzai landowners. Sometimes 'holy' leaders may even become independent political rulers. In all cases, like the Brahmans of old, they claim political or administrative authority, and take an active part and at times a prominent part in political life. In ancient Indian literature we often read of gifts to Brahmans including gifts of villages. The growth of their secular power—or at least of certain sections among them led to rivalry with the Kshatriyas, of which we find such clear expression in the Buddhist Jatakas, for instance, and in the story of Parusuram the warrior Brahman who wiped out the Kshatriya population.

The following is a list of castes in the Swat villages of Sangota, Worejo, Nalkot, and Biha, compiled by Barth.⁶ There are certain differences with Hindu castes of the Ganges plains. Among the Swat valley people three criteria determine caste status—wealth, political ascendancy and purity, as outlined above. There is greater mobility of occupation—thus Pathans can take up a variety of jobs except the polluting ones like scavenging. Similarly the occupations of washermen, barbers, thong—and sieve-makers, dancers because of their association with prostitution, are regarded as polluting occupations. Two farmers work as tailors, others as carpenters and muleteers. The people are fully aware that the caste of a family can be changed. One hears statements like ‘they used to be herders, but now they are farmers’, or ‘they were really Pakhtuns, but ate up all their lands, and now they are smiths.’ Such mobility is gradual, thus the son of a priest who takes to carpentry may be regarded as a priest, so will his son. But in the third generation unless his ties with his caste relatives are associated, he may be regarded as belonging to the carpenter caste.

Sometimes new castes spring up e.g. the maker of a new type of sandal was regarded as more honourable than the ordinary leather worker. In spite of this relative mobility the degree of correspondence between caste and occupation is striking. Granting the appropriateness of priests engaging in agriculture and trade,—the percentage of persons engaging in occupations inappropriate to their caste is a mere sixteen per cent in the four villages of the census.⁷

With respect to consensus of opinion regarding caste ranking, as in Hindu society—the position of castes at the top and the bottom of the hierarchy are generally seen clearly and accepted by different castes. It is in the middle, where competition for status is considerable and undecided, that disagreements about status are most frequent.

descendant of the Prophet ...	Sayyid
descendants of Saints	
various orders of Sainthood	Sahibzada
	Mian, Akhundzada
	Pirzada

⁶ *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*; p. 17.

⁷ Barth, op. cit. p. 20.

landholding tribesman	...	...	...	Pakhtun
Priest	...	...	...	Mullah
shopkeeper	...	...	...	Dukandar
muleteer	...	...	...	Paracha
farmer	...	...	...	Zamidar
goldsmith	...	...	...	Zerger
tailor	...	...	...	Sarkhamar
carpenter	...	...	...	Tarkhan
smith	...	...	...	Inger
potter	...	...	...	Kulal
oilpresser	...	...	...	Tili
cotton-carder	...	...	...	Landap
butcher	...	...	...	Qasai
leather-worker	...	...	...	Mochi/Chamyar
weaver	...	...	...	Jola
agricultural labourer	...	...	...	Dehqan
herdsman (in part non-Pashto speaking)	...	...	...	Gujar
ferryman	...	...	...	Jalawan
musician and dancer	...	...	...	Dem
barber	...	...	...	Nai
washerman	...	...	...	Dobi

We can now look at the different populations of Afghanistan. The chief people in Afghanistan are the Pakhtuns. Their language is called Pashto. But around them are peoples like the Tajik who are mainly in the North-east; the Uzbek who are in the North; and the Turcoman in the North-west. On the south-western borders of Afghanistan are a Biloch speaking minority and on the south-eastern frontiers, along the Hindu-Kush mountains are an interesting people formerly called the Kafirs (infidels), but since their recent conversion to Islam, are now known as Nuris.

The settlement of Afghanistan has briefly been something like this: Not much is known of the pre-Aryan population, but round about the 2nd millenium B.C. the Aryan settlement of Afghanistan, Iran and north India took place. Then in the opening years of the Christian era came the invasion of the Sakas, the White Huns or the Yuch-Chi and the Biloch.

In the 7th century A.D. began to come peoples of a Turkic speech, for instance, the Khalij Turks, who moved into South Afghanistan in the 10th century and from whom came the Khalji dynasty of Delhi. Some of the Turkic speaking tribes have remained completely nomad.

Then in the 13th century A.D. came the Mongols, for instance, the half a million or so of the Hazaras, who arrived there at this time and some in the 15th century. Some of them are also said to be the descendants of Chengiz Khan's garrison. In the 15th century A.D. came the Uzbeks, who formed a confederation and gradually established themselves as rulers of the states along the rivers—the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya. A part of them settled in territory now included in Afghanistan.

Thus Afghanistan has known a series of settlements. Afghan society today bears the mark of these settlements. The Central Government seeks to unify the country, strengthen the national state. In Afghan society however there still exists remnants of feudal and tribal principalities, and their chieftains. A growing group of commercial and industrial elements which started in the '30s with a monopoly of the sugar trade, soon established the first Afghan Bank—the Afghan National Bank, and began to develop industry. The relation of the new group to the government has been alternately one of co-operation and one of conflict. It supports the steps taken by the Government which it believes would strengthen the country's economy and unity.

The other groups which support the cause of national unity, economic development and more democracy are small middle class people including intellectuals, a section of the modern trained bureaucracy, a small but growing group of factory labour and peasants mainly. The situation is quite similar to that seen in the different states in India and Pakistan, where linguistic movements have grown up. Only in Afghanistan the demand is for re-unification with Pakhtunistan.⁸

Nevertheless in the 19th century there was and there still are today tribal societies. For our purpose it is interesting to examine briefly some features of these tribal societies. We shall

⁸ *Afghanistan*. Wilber, Donald N. ed. Human Relations Area Files, New Haven. Connecticut. U.S.A. 1956.

take some of the Pashto speaking tribes, as they are the most relevant to ancient Indian history. The Gandhari have been connected with the present day Mohmands and the Yusufzai etc. (cf Dr. Bellew op. cit.). Apart from Indian sources like the Mahabharata which refer to the Gandhari, it is interesting to corroborate the information they give with what the Greek historian Herodotus has written: Herodotus mentioned four great divisions of the Pactiyae (Pashto, Vedic 'Pakhta' perhaps). They were the Gandhari; the Aparytoe (The Afridi still call themselves Aparide); the Satragyddae or Kshattak (present day Khattak); and the Dadicae or Dadi. At the beginning of the Muslim era the Afridi held all the country of the Safed Koh, while the Dadi held modern Sewestan and the country between the Kandahar Province and the Sulemans; while the Kshattak held the Suleman range and the northern part of the plains between it and the Indus. Ibbetson considered that these three peoples constituted the nucleus of the Pathans proper (op. cit. p. 202). But around this nucleus have collected many tribes of foreign origin, such as the Saka Kakar, the Rajput Waziri and a number of Turkic tribes. The invaders adopted the Pashto language, Islam and have also invented traditions of common descent, which express and strengthen their present association. The Afridi were nominally converted to Islam by Mahmud of Ghazni, but the real conversion of the Pathan tribes dates from the time of Shahab-ud-din Ghorî, when Arab apostles with the title of Saiyad and Indian converts with the title of Sheikh spread through the country and converted the Pathans.

Tribal organization of the Pathans: Ibbetson writes on the subject the following:—The tribe is probably far more homogeneous in its constitution among the Pathans than among the Biloches. Saiyad, Turk, and other clans have occasionally been affiliated to it; but as a rule people of foreign descent have merely associated, and not intermingled, with the tribes among whom they have settled. Even then they generally claim Pathan descent on the female side, and the tribe is usually descended in theory from a common ancestor. The 'hamsayah' custom by which strangers are protected by the tribe from whom they have sought shelter is in full force among the Pathans as among the Biloches. Among the Pathans, however, this often consists of traders, artisans and menials. The tribe is the practical unit. Each section

of a tribe, however small, has its leading man who is known as Malik. In many, but by no means in all tribes, there is a Khan Khel or Chief House, usually the eldest branch of the tribe, whose Malik is known as Khan, and acts as chief of the whole tribe. But he is seldom more than their leader in war and their agent in dealings with others; he possesses influence rather than power; and the real authority rests with the jirgah, a democratic council composed of all the Maliks. The tribe is split up into numerous clans, and these again into septs. The tribe, clan and sept are alike distinguished by patronymics formed by the addition of the word 'zai' or 'Khel' ! Both terms are used indifferently for the larger and the smaller divisions. These tribes have a very definite corporate existence, each tribe and within each tribe each clan occupying a clearly defined tract of country, though they are in the Indus Valley often the owners merely, rather than the cultivators—the cultivation being done by a peasant population, who had formerly been in possession of the land, but now cultivate subject to the superior rights of the Pathans. The Pathan has the same contemptuous attitude towards them, as the Biloch has towards its subject Jat peasant. The term for them is Hindki.

The origin of the true Pathans is Indo-Iranian. A very interesting institution of the Pathan tribes, which we have mentioned in passing is the 'jirgah', which some historians and scholars trace back to the early days of Ariana, ancient name for Indo-Iranian Afghanistan and Persia.

In the old days all important affairs were decided upon through the jirgah. It is said that when Sultan Bahlol Lodi, a Pashto king of Delhi held a jirgah convened in the royal palace and consisting of his generals he sat on the floor with them and talked to them as equals.

The jirgah has rules, regulations and formalities of its own. The place where the jirgah is to be convened is selected and the members of the jirgah are elected by the people. The usual procedure of discussion and debate is set by traditional practice. Each member expresses his thought on the given problem according to his turn. A speech given in the jirgah usually starts with an introduction which is full of proverbs and historical references. The body of the speech is presented in a restrained, forceful and convincing manner. Complete freedom of speech exists and also

of discussion in the jirgah. Speeches lacking sound logic and careful thinking are forbidden. If somebody says something unsound the members of the jirgah will prevent him from making further speeches. There are interesting parallels in the Vedic literature where prayers are offered for success in debate and to the elaborate rules of procedure in Buddhist deliberations, which are discussed elsewhere. Usually elderly men participate in the discussion while the young men serve them with refreshments and water. Exceptionally able younger men may also participate, as the Mahabharata says they are 'Elders by Knowledge'. Some jirghas continue for several days and in the end the decision is read to the members and announced to the local people. At the close of a jirgah there is a feast for the members of the community.⁹

We can now draw together the threads of the preceding discussions. When we pass from the Pathan tribal areas to the areas where the Pastoral Pathans have settled down to agriculture either as cultivators or as a group parasitic on the original cultivators, we pass from a practically classless and casteless society to a class society and a society where a caste system of the Later Vedic type—the four 'varna' type—develops; and one which as Ibbetson has pointed has strong parallels with the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra of the Vedas. In the western Punjab the dominant group is not generally the Pathan, but may be the Rajput, Awan or Jat according to the locality. This four-caste system, however, as can be seen in Swat, contains the seeds of a considerably extended division of labour and an increase in the number of caste associations based upon this division. This gives rise to the more modern 'jati' system of caste. And this is what we see in the eastern part of Punjab. Greater technological advance, a more fertile soil and a greater agricultural surplus were the main factors. Here, there is a greater degree of production for the market and not for the 'jajman' and hence a greater development of trade. In the Central Punjab the picture has been modified somewhat by the fact that it was the seat of the great Sikh Jat uprising in the late middle ages. The Sikhs had tried systematically to destroy the gentry as a power-in many

⁹ *Afghanistan* ed. Donald N. Wilber. Ibbetson op. cit. p. 199 seq.

cases the local Rajputs. Later on feudalism arose among the Sikhs themselves again. In the Kangra area in north Punjab we seem to have a situation intermediate between the western zone and the eastern zone, more similar in many respects to the west in spite of the difference in religion, Kangra like the east being Hindu. East of the Punjab the structure of caste society is similar to that of East Punjab.

This development which we see here in space, and ultimately due to the growth of technology, is to be seen in time also. Historical records clearly show this process at work. Early Vedic society is tribal, democratic, knows little of class or caste divisions. Later Vedic society saw the development of the four caste systems. The growth of the division of labour, of technology led to the development of the later 'jati' system. Let us see this process in the next chapter.

PROBABLE CONDITIONS IN WHICH INDIAN CASTE SOCIETY EMERGED (III)

BETWEEN THE JATI system of north-east India of today and the four caste system there were transitional phases. Can we find historical data relating to this area which shows this transition to any extent? The earliest Buddhist period seems to afford such an example. It is not our purpose here to conduct detailed historical research. The sociologist can afford clues to those engaged in historical work. Detailed investigations must be carried on by the latter. Here we shall refer to certain facts, generally held established by historians, which have sociological significance, which have a bearing on the issues we have been discussing.

The Pali Canons refer to a certain area of the Indo-Gangetic plains, North-eastern Bihar (Videha) and to some extent North Bihar and East Uttar Pradesh (Kasi etc.). Their date is held to be more or less contemporary with that of the Buddha. Here are some of the broad social facts, which can be obtained from such books, relevant to our issue: At that time in these localities the four-caste system was not operating. It had become a memory. Of the four castes only Brahmans and Khattiyas are mentioned regularly, though even here it is difficult to identify them as a homogenous groups. The others are generally referred to by their occupations. Only occasionally are such persons referred to as Vessa (Vaisya) and Sudda (Sudra); and this is done it seems to fit them into the classical four-caste scheme. This scheme, it seems, had become a conceptual device to classify the status of people by using the authority of the Vedas.

A very interesting group is that termed 'Gahapati'. Gahapatis were those who had risen in wealth and power from the ranks of their occupations. Considerable mobility of labour is indicated by the mentions of Brahmans, who had become Gahapatis by taking to trade, agriculture, cattle-raising etc. There were Gahapatis drawn from other occupations also. It seemed that only Khattiyas were generally not called Gahapatis. In Manu we find reference to hereditary occupation (cf. later). In these books,

however, we get the notion of extended kin-groups tending to follow certain trades, but not exclusively, rather than strict occupational castes. The dominance of the Licchavi aristocracy is frequently mentioned. The Jatakas cover a wider field in both space and time, from, it is surmised, pre-Buddhist times till after the birth of Christ. Nevertheless the broad social picture that they paint is helpful. They substantiate with more detail the above picture. There is mobility of labour. The Brahman does not follow his occupation theoretically prescribed by the four-caste theory. Brahmans are mentioned a number of times as engaged in agriculture. In one story we see a poor Brahman farmer complaining that he cannot plough any more, as one of his oxen is dead (J. 3. p. 163). In another we read of a Brahman unyoke his oxen after ploughing and begin to work on his land with the spade (J. 5. p. 68). Some of these farmers are wealthy also and possess as much as 1000 'karisas' of land. (J. 3. p. 293; J. 4. 276). The wealthy Brahmans are frequently referred to (J. 1. p. 140; J. 2. p. 272; 4. p. 237, 325, etc.). Brahmans were also engaged in peddling (J. 2. p. 15) as well as large-scale trading (J. 4. p. 15). Other Brahmans are engaged in hunting (J. 2. p. 200), carpentry: (J. 4. p. 207), as shepherds (J. 3. p. 401) and archers (J. 3. p. 209).¹

The Khattiya, like the Brahman, also could and did engage in a variety of occupation (J. 2, p. 27; J. 4, pp. 84, 169; J. 5, pp. 390-3).

The Vessa (Vaisya), R. L. Mehta says about the Vessa: "Very seldom does the word Vessa occur in the Jatakas, and when it occurs it is used only in connection with theoretical discussions, and not to mean any existing social unit or group."²

Fick is of a similar opinion: "A caste, in the sense of the Brahmanical theory, the Vaisyas never became even in the western Brahmanical lands."³ And again, "Originally in the oldest Vedic age, a name for the class of cattle-breeding, and land-cultivating Aryan settlers, it served later the purpose of the theorising Brahmans to bind together the unlimited number of social groups."⁴ A noteworthy group is that of the Gahapati or 'householder.' They are drawn from different occupations—

¹ cf. also Fick, *The Social Organization, in N. E. India in Buddha's time*, p. 247.

² R. L. Mehta, *Pre-Buddhist India*, p. 255.

³ R. Fick, *op. cit.* p. 252.

⁴ R. Fick, *op. cit.*

traders, businessmen, craftsmen, artisans, farmers, Brahmans, but are also distinguished from the mass of the poorer craftsmen, farmers etc. as Mehta says, they do not form an exclusive and closed group, bound by rigid caste rules. Synonymous with the word Gahapati is the term Kutumbika. They are as a rule well-to-do or wealthy citizens at the head of a household. A Kutumbika living in a town carries on the business or corn selling. (J. 2. p. 267), an extensive rich trade (J. 4. p. 370). The Kutumbikas of the villages were well-to-do farmers.

Though the Gahapatis did not form a closed exclusive group, and it seemed that they were being continually recruited from the more prosperous section of the different occupations, the term also came to mean a hereditary title. Thus we read of a poor Gahapati who maintains himself and his mother with difficulty by working as a hired labourer. (J. 2. p. 139; cf. also J. 3. p. 378). In this sense, the term Gahapati corresponds to the modern connotation of the term Vaishya, which refers to a host of castes, the great majority of whom are traders and merchants-like the Baniyas, Aroras, Bhatias, Agarwals, Khatri, etc. Of course in modern times they are not primarily known as Vaishyas, which is a classificatory term, but by their caste names e.g. Aroras, Khatri, Agarwals, etc. or by a generic term like Baniya. The term Gahapati disappeared in the course of history. It is possible that many Gahapati families and kingroups became the modern Baniya castes.

Let us summarise the picture that emerges from this Buddhist literature. The Jatakas cover a wider area and period of time than do the Pali Canons. It has been stated that numbers of them have been rewritten considerably after Buddha's time and in regions outside the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, like Ceylon. The Pali Canons on the other hand were written in Buddha's period in North-eastern India and refer to that region in particular. Nevertheless both sets of books present the same social picture as regards the object of our enquiry. They indicate a multiplicity of crafts, not mentioned in Vedic literature, and attested to by the archaeological evidence; a fairly considerable growth of trade; the formation of craft associations and merchant associations, which later on might have ossified into sub-caste associations. The rise of the Gahapatis indicate a fair amount of

labour mobility, and it appears, the increasing social and political role of these merchants, peasant-traders and artisan traders, at least in that period. Mobility of labour is also testified by the variety of occupations undertaken by both Brahmans and Khattiyas.⁵ Marriage tended to be within the same occupational group in so far as the available evidence goes, but in such matters, apart from the Brahmans (J. 3. p. 93) and the Khattiyas (cf. Digha Nikaya 3.1.24) the term for the endogamous group is neither Vessa nor Sudda. The phrase used is—to marry a woman of the “same type”, ‘sadisi bhariya’, (cf. J. 4. p. 99, Gatha 24). Marrying outside the group or rank is also known e.g. when *Senapati* Ahiparaka married a merchant’s daughter Ummadanti (J. 5. p. 211).

These regions are ruled by specific military aristocracies like the Licchavis and the Mallas. The Khattiya challenges and the Khattiya Buddhist writers sometimes affect to despise the Brahman, with whom real conflicts also appear to exist, nevertheless it seems that the ritual position in society of the Brahmans is supreme. This seems to be evidenced from Buddha’s references to the Brahmans and by the attitude of the Brahmans to the Buddha in the Pali Canons.

In this period and in these regions it is fairly clear that the four caste system no longer exists, but equally that the modern jati system has not come in fully either.

The jati system rules today in the above regions in particular, and in the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in general. The next question that we might ask is, “At what period did it start operating full-scale?” Or to put it more specifically: “In which historical records do we find one of the earliest instances of its full functioning?” Of the available literature, the Code of Manu is one of the books that seem to offer a possible clue to the period of this transition. It is the task of historians to deal with this matter in detail.

The Laws or the Code of Manu is not descriptive of social life in the way, for instance, the Jatakas are. The question, however, is—does it or does it not reflect to a greater or lesser extent the social reality—of its time? If the codification is based on void so far as social facts are concerned, then we have to accept Manu

⁵ cf. also Rhys Davids ‘*Buddhist India*’ attests this.

as living in a world of his own. Manu may be described as an exponent of fanatical Brahmanism, but hardly as a victim of hallucination. If the Code was not the work of a single person it is equally improbable that it should be the work of a collective hallucination.

The dates of the Code according to historians like Buhler (*'Sacred Books of the East,'* xxv, Introd.), Jayaswal, (*'Manu and Yajnavalkya,'* pp. 25-32), Kane, (*'Hist. of the Dharma Sutras,'* ii, p. xi), lie between c. 200 B.C.—c. 200 A.D. Burnell in his introduction to his translation edited by E. Hopkins has a wider range—between 1 A.D. and 500 A.D. He says that it was a popular work intended for Rajas and similar peoples in order to serve as a legal and administrative handbook; that the text bears out that the writer was a Brahman from Eastern Punjab or the Western Uttar Pradesh (Brahmavarta and Brahmarshidesha in the text); that it appeared to have been written in an area not so familiar with the Sanskrit language (2—123 and 126 of the text); that it was written at the court of either the Western Calukyas of the Gujerat area, or the Calukya kings of the Deccan of this period; that the society referred to was of Brahmavarta and Brahmarshidesha (2.17—20). The general trend among historians is to place the date much earlier than the 6th century A.D. What is of more significance to us is that they more or less agree that the lowest date could not be less than 200 B.C.

With respect to the ideal society referred to in the text—the writer is aware of the Dravidas, but they and their language are barbaric (Mlecchas) (10.43—44). Various groups of the Andhras are also described as Antaj or outcastes (10.36 & 48) and forest hunters. The Dravida or Tamil kings did not as yet recognise Brahmans like the Mallas, Licchavis etc. and hence were similarly born of Vratya members of the regal caste (10.22, also 43—44).

Apart from that he does not show much knowledge of particular South Indian peoples and castes. On the other hand some of the castes he mentions bear the identical name today in North India e.g. Kaivartta (10-34) who, he says, live in Aryavarta; Abhira or Ahirs (10—15); Suta (10—11). These castes do not of course, occur in South India today, though Ahirs may be found in Central India and the Deccan. Manu shows familiarity with Central Asian peoples and with those bordering the Punjab. In verses 43 and 44

of Lesson 10 he mentions the Kiratas, who can be still found in Tibet; Khasas, who may be related to the modern Khasas of the East Punjab Himalayas; the Daradas, who may be identified with the Dardic speaking peoples of the Hindu Kush of today—all of whom probably did not recognise Brahmans in his time, as he says. In addition he mentions Pahlavas (from Persia), Kambojas (who may be connected to the modern Kamboh caste in the Punjab), Yavanas (Greeks), Sakas (Scythians), Chinasa (Chinese) etc.

Finally Manu himself names the ideal society whose customs should be followed and whose Brahmans should be obeyed :—

“17. The (country) which is between the divine rivers Sarasvati and Drsadvati, that land, fixed by the gods, (the wise) call Brahnavarta.

18. What custom of the (four) castes (and) the mixed castes has been handed down by course of succession in that country, that is called good custom.

19. Kurukshetra, Matsya, Panchala, Surasenaka (are) indeed Brahmarshi land next to Brahnavarta.

20. All men in the world should learn their own proper behaviour from a Brahman born in that country.” (2.17 to 20).⁶

In terms of today's geography it becomes pretty certain that the ideal country, whose customs and rules he is going to describe covers East Punjab and the Uttar Pradesh (particularly the western Uttar Pradesh). These customs have to be enforced by kings of other regions also. Manu says that he is describing the customs prevailing in the above area. What is of double significance for us is the fact that it is precisely this region that we have been comparing to the Frontier Province and the East Himalayan Punjab of today. As we shall see in the following pages that Manu's account gives strong indications that the jati type of caste society was functioning there in his time. The lag in social development of the East Punjab Himalayas seems at least to have been existing from this time.

In order to get a better estimate of the Code's sociological content, it would be useful to state Manu's standpoints with respect

⁶ Unless specified the quotations are from Burnell's Translation, edited by E. Hopkins.

to (1) occupation, (2) marriage between occupational groups and (3) the view the state authority should take, its attitude, to these questions.

He laid special emphasis on the preservation of the caste system by the king: "That realm where these caste-debasing mixtures are produced goes right quickly to destruction, together with the inhabitants of the realm" (10-61, ed. by E. Hopkins).

"The king has been created (to be) the protector of the castes and orders, who, all according to their rank, discharge their several duties." (7-35, trans. by G. Buhler, *The Sacred Books of The East*, Vol. 25).

"The king should carefully compel 'vaisyas' and 'sudras' to perform the work (prescribed) for them; for if these two (castes) swerved from their duties, they would throw this whole world into confusion." (1-418, Buhler's trans.)

Thus, the king's duty is to enforce the hereditary division of labour. The king should not only protect the Brahmans and exercise in scale the severest penalties for crimes committed against Brahmans, he should also obey the Brahmans:—"Never ceasing from battle, protection also of the people, (and) obedience to Brahmans (are) the chief cause of bliss to kings" (7-88, Hopkins ed.). For "on account of his pre-eminence, on account of the superiority of his origin, on account of his observance of (particular) restrictive rules, and on account of his particular sanctification, the Brahman is the lord of all castes." (10-3, Buhler's translation).

Marriage should be within the caste: "Let a twice-born man dismissed by (his) Guru, having bathed according to rule, having returned home, marry a wife of the same caste endowed with (good) marks." (3-4, Hopkins ed.) "In all the castes those (sons) and those only, are to be recognised as born equal in caste which are born in the caste order, of pure wives, equal (in caste)..." (10-5, Hopkins ed.).

Nevertheless the twice-born are allowed to take wives, after the approved first marriage within the caste, from lower orders. Thus, "For twice-born men, at first a woman of the same caste is approved for marrying; but of those who act from lust, those of lower caste may in order (be wives)..." (3-12, Hopkins ed.).

Though he affirms that there are only four castes, and no fifth—"The Brahman, Kshatriya (and) Vaisya (constitute) the three twice-born castes; but the fourth, the Sudra has only one birth. There is no fifth caste." (10-4, Hopkins ed.)—nevertheless the reality is a multiplicity of castes and he is forced to account for them. He accounts for their origin as being due to various grades of intermixture of the castes, and his list runs literally into scores. (cf. Lesson 10). Some interesting examples in his account are these: The Abhira have been identified with the modern Ahirs, who are generally pastoralists and who were supposed to have been pastoral tribes formerly. Manu ascribes their origin to the intermarriage of a Brahman and an Ambastha girl (10-15). Then "A leather-worker (called) Karvara is born of a Nisada." (10-36).

"Management of horses and driving wagons is the occupation of Sutas" (10-47). But the Suta is born "From a Kshatriya by a girl of the priestly caste." (10-11).

"Killing fish," (is the occupation of) the "Nisadas" (10-47); but he is born "From a Brahman by a Sudra girl..." (10-8). And a Nisada begets a Margava (or) Dasa, who lives by working in vessels, whom they that live in Aryavarta call Kaivarta (fisher)" (10-34).

"...from a Vaisya are born by women of the king(ly) (and) priestly caste a Magadha and Vaideha (10-11). The occupation of the Magadha is "the way of the tradesman..." (10-47). One would presume from the names of the last two, that the names were applied to persons belonging to Magadh and Videha, a practice still common. And so on.

The origin of certain castes, it is true, may be due to intercaste marriages, as sometimes happens in Kangra today, but from Manu's own account the large differentiation of occupations is clearly borne out. His explanation of mixed origin, of course, appears exaggerated e.g. Abhiras, Magadhas, Videhas, etc. It is interesting to note that the Nisada is a fisherman and he begets a Margava who lives, it seems by plying vessels. This may be the division of one sub-caste into two. Again a number of Manu's mixed-origin castes appear to be tribal groups who have attached themselves to settled peasant society e.g. trappers called Sairandhra (10-32); reed mat and basket makers called Pandusopaka (10-37); hunters of forest animals called Meda, etc.

Manu's period was also the period of invasions from Central Asia. It seems that the rulers of these peoples did not recognise Brahmans as yet, and hence Manu says: "Gradually, through the loss of sacred ceremonies, and by not seeing Brahmans, the following families of Kshatriyas have reached the condition of Vrsalas among men:

"Pandurakas, Odras, Dravidas, Kambojas, Yavanas (Greeks), Sakas (Scythians), Paradas, Pahlavas (from Persia), Chinas (Chinese), Kiratas, Daradas (ancestors of the present peoples of the Hindu Kush probably), Khasas." (10, 43-44). The Dravidas would refer to the people of South India, particularly the Tamils. But Manu goes on to assert that—"Whatever classes (there are) among men outside of those born from the mouth, arm, thigh, and foot (of Brahma), all those (people) are called Dasyus, whether the language they use be that of Mlecchas (barbarians) or of Aryas." (10-45). Later on, probably as Vincent Smith says when their rulers accepted Brahmans, they were called Rajputs of Solar, Lunar and a new one, created for the occasion—Fire (Agni) dynasties. In Manu's time, however, they appeared as a source of social disruption.

The account given above show Manu's attitude to hereditary occupations, intercaste marriage and desired state policy towards these questions. It also gives an account of some of the castes described by him. Summarising, one can say that a multiplicity of hereditary castes or sub-castes had appeared in Brahmvarta and Brahmarshidesha by about 200 B.C. onwards at least. Manu wants to fit this large number into the four-caste system, which is his constant frame of reference, and which is also, of course, derived from the Vedas. To deny the theory was to run the risk of either loosing the sanction of the Vedas or helping to undermine its authority. The point to prove was that the caste system was God-given. Occupation had become or was becoming hereditary and Manu insists that the king should enforce this. Marriage seems to have been tending to be endogamous and Manu insists that the State should enforce it, for "caste debasing mixtures destroy the realm."

In effect what Manu insists on is that the jati type of caste system should be imposed, although he calls it the four-caste system. In his ideal land it had already developed.

ANCIENT INDIAN THEORIES OF THE IMPACT OF
AGRICULTURAL ON TRIBAL SOCIETY

We pointed out the truth in Weber and Kroeber's contention that the conditions in which Indian caste society developed were complex. A simple conquest theory is inadequate. The preceding analysis confirms it. Again facts seem to indicate that the break-up of Yusufzai tribal society into their four-caste system is associated with their taking to agriculture; and the more complex multi-caste jati society is also associated with greater agricultural productivity and technological advance. Modesty, however, is a desirable virtue. Lest one should think that we are saying something original in our times, let us turn to what some ancient writers have to say about this subject:

Though there were specialized texts on social matters in the ancient times like the *Dharma* and *Griha-Sutras*, Kautilya's '*Arthashastra*', Vatsyana's '*Kama Sutra*', and so on, a part of Indian literature which deals with social topics are devoted also to a range of other subjects like philosophy, religion, myths, history, stories, etc., e.g., the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, the Buddhist *Jatakas*, Jain texts etc. It was a kind of composite literature. How are we to evaluate the various observations made about society in them? They were not sociological texts on the one hand. On the other hand, the observations are very pertinent. They reveal attitudes. Sometimes their theoretical observations are stated casually, as if they were common knowledge. In other places as in the Buddhist Sacred literature these observations are the basis of much of their ethical theory. This can also be seen in the *Santi Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. In these places what is stated are definite social theories. The fact that they form a part of a larger whole devoted to other subjects must not mislead us into thinking that they were accidental. The fact is that the ancients were not so much in the habit of writing specialized texts like the moderns. What seems to indicate that their various observations on society were not accidental, but reveal basic attitudes is the interesting uniformity of these utterances. In this sense the best way to deal with them is to classify a number of them topic-wise. The *Puranas*, the *Mahabharata*, the Jain and Buddhist literature etc. depict conditions before 'varna' society. Among their statements on this theme

we can single out the following common and essential characteristics:

(1) The earliest method of obtaining food was by food gathering. The means of subsistence then were fruits and roots of plants. (c.f. Vayu Purana, 1. viii. 84; Mahavastu 1.340-41; Padam Carita, 111.55). The Mahavastu for instance refers to wild creepers (vanalata) and some sort of roots (bhumiparpataka).

(2) The Mahabharata and the Puranas state that formerly there existed a state of promiscuity. In the Krita age there was neither mating nor a recognised monogamous system of marriage (cf. Santi Parva, 207.38-41; Vayu Purana, 1 vii. 57.) The Atanatiya Sutta in the Digha-Nikaya refers to the land of the Kurus thus: "There do men live calling no goods their own. Nor as their chattels any womankind." (Sacred Books of the Buddhists, IV. 192). Modern anthropological research confirms that among a number of pre-literate peoples, whether the institution of marriage exists or not, there is promiscuity.

(3) There were no 'varnas' in the Krita age. This is stated by the Vayu Purana (i. VIII. 60). The Buddhist Mahavastu also affirms this (1.340-6). In Yaghestan, the unadministered Territory between the N.W.F.P. and Afghanistan, tribes like the Masuds have no stratification. This area is also near the area of the fabled Uttar Kurus. Further in a statistical survey of over 500 pre-literate societies, Hobhouse, Wheeler and Ginsberg showed that social stratification does not exist among hunting and collecting peoples; and that it comes into existence with the introduction of agriculture and pastoralism.⁷ The development of government and public justice, (ibid. Ch. 2), war and slavery are similarly correlated by them (ibid Ch. 4). According to the Mahabharata war did not exist in the Krita Yuga. But men were also poorer. Thus Bhishma discusses with the Pandava princes before battle. Seen out of the context of modern anthropological research, such statements have appeared as wishful idealisation of the primitive past. The repetition of such statements would suggest the survival of primitive history in the shape of myths, apart from any wishful fantasies. For the implications derived from them in the Mahabharata, the Buddhist and Jain texts are not pleas to return to this past. They

⁷ Hobhouse, Wheeler and Ginsberg, *"The Material Culture and the Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples"*. Chapman and Hall, London. 1930. Chapter IV.

are to face the changed situation of the present. Different ages have different characteristics. These are the characteristics of the Koli Yuga as compared with the others. It is possible that the authors of such statements were shrewd observers of social processes going around them. Witness Kautilya's statement in the Arthashastra that in certain lands (in societies contemporary to him) called 'vairajya' or kingless, the people had no sense of thine and mine (A.S. VII). The Mahabharata itself contains an extensive body of information describing different societies, as do the Law Books. The widespread and pervasive notion of the theory of Yugas in social development points to their persistence in popular tradition and myths.

According to the Vayu Purana (I. VIII. 128; also 142-145; 154), the Markandeya Purana (Ch. 49-51, 60 & 74), and the Mahavastu this harmonious life of primitive food gatherers was destroyed by the discovery of agriculture. This is how the Buddhist Mahavastu describes the process: Rice fields were divided and boundaries were set up, saying 'This is thine, this is mine' (S.B.B.* IV. 87). People began to store rice (S.B.B. IV. 86. Mahavastu 1.343). The looting of other people's rice then led to the creation of the office of the protector of the fields, the Mahakhattiya (the great aristocrat). (S.B.B. IV. 88, Mahavastu 1.347-8).

Among the Swat Pathans a periodical redistribution of cultivable land used to be held in the community to ensure fairness to all. In time so much violence developed mainly out of the appropriation of extensive areas by certain powerful kin-groups that this system of exchange called 'vesh' has been discontinued. (cf. Barth, op. cit. pp. 64-66, 75-76; 119-20). The Vayu Purana says that with the introduction of agriculture people began to appropriate to themselves by force and violence rivers, fields, hills, trees, shrubs and plants (I. VIII.31). One of the problems faced by Swat Pathans is the lack of government as such. Social control is attempted by the institution of the blood feud and by a series of allegiances and alliances. The instability and the unceasing strife leads increasingly to the emergence of a fewer number of more powerful families to whom larger numbers of other kin-groups begin to give allegiance in exchange of pro-

* S.B.B.: "Sacred Books of the Buddhists".

tection on the one hand; on the other hand it no doubt creates a demand on the part of large number of individuals for stable centralised government, public justice, if necessary exercised by a single family. It is interesting to note the moral conflict that emerges in the individual in the transference of his allegiance from his kin-group to his protector's group. Which morality is he to follow: the older kin law or the new code of self-interest and feudal allegiance? This is precisely the question that Arjuna asks Krishna in the Gita. The Santi Parva in the Mahabharata describes the process of the formation of government: The wealth of one is snatched away by two, that of two is snatched away by many acting together. He who is not a slave is made a slave. Women, again, are forcibly abducted. For these reasons the gods created kings for protecting the people. (67.14 sq.). And when the people made a compact to put an end to such a state of affairs, two main conditions were made, that they should deal with those who abducted other people's wives or robbed other people's wealth. In addition the compact was made to inspire confidence among all the varnas (op. cit. 67-19). Undoubtedly those who possessed most, gained most from the institution of such government. The task of the state, as Manu states, was to maintain the varna system (Manu, 10.61 cf. also above).

Of the seven elements that go to make a state, Kautilya says bluntly the most important element is force. (Arthashastra, VI.1).

Historians will be able to elucidate many interesting details and problems. To go further is beyond our scope. But enough has been said, one thinks, to bring out the fact that the opinions and theories of these ancient writers substantiate further what has been said here of the line of development of Indian society. They were statements made by persons who observed and participated in the social changes that they wrote about, or lived nearer to them in time to record popular traditions.

Looking across the span of centuries, we cannot but be impressed by the profundity of their generalisation of the great social changes caused by the introduction of agriculture. If they had returned today, they would no doubt have found a further confirmation of their theory, when they saw the great changes made by the introduction of the new techniques of modern industry and commerce in the society of Bharatvarsha. Some of these we shall note in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CASTE STATUS AND WEALTH

MCKIM MARRIOT says "the way to gain or maintain high rank is to secure dominance in the system of ritual interactions most commonly secured by using wealth or power respectively to purchase or command higher positions in feasting or more honorific and purifying services from other castes. Moneylending and control of land rights seem to provide the most effective levers of securing higher rank in Kisan Garhi (U.P. village) at the present day."¹

Dr. I. Karve stated recently that the most important feature of the caste system was economic inequality coupled with cultural inequality. "The castes which are the lowest in status are also the lowest as regards their income and cultural achievements."

Blunt points out how "Social expenditure is also high among low castes that have prospered and accordingly have begun to ape their betters. They then give up their low caste customs, they prohibit, for instance, the remarriage of widows, abandon the use of intoxicants, reduce the age of marriage, pay Brahman's large fees to serve their rites, and increase their expenditure on marriages and other social ceremonies. Finally, they advance claims to be descended from some higher group of castes, the Brahman, the Chattri, or the Vaishya.³ Here Blunt links increased caste status (what Karve would say was "cultural achievement") or attempts to achieve it with increases in wealth.

The indirect relationships pointed out by these statements are between caste status and wealth.

Ibbetson points out the correlation between political importance or power and the social standing of castes. "Where the actual calling of everyday life is the same, social standing, which is all that caste means, depends very largely upon political importance, whether present or belonging to the recent past. There is the widest distinction between the dominant and the subject tribes;

¹ "Man in India" April-June 1959, p. 99.

² Karve "The Removal of Untouchability" Delhi, Sept. 1956, p. 58.

³ "The caste System of Northern India" p. 264.

and a tribe which has acquired political independence in one part of the country, will there enjoy a position in the ranks of caste which is denied it in that where it occupies a subordinate position... The rise in the social scale which accompanies increased political importance will presently be followed by a rise in caste."⁴

We may term economic and political power as secular power, and the statuses associated with them as secular statuses (as we have discussed in Ch. 1).

The dominant caste, apart from its ritual aspects, is seen to be dominant primarily in one or both of these secular spheres. The question to be considered in this chapter is what is the correlation between secular power and caste status.

In the recent field studies quoted above certain common features seem to emerge which are relevant to my theme. There is a correspondence between the ritual ranking of castes and the local distribution of power and wealth. The following table with respect to 12 Indian villages surveyed shows that the main property holding castes, called the dominant caste of those villages by the investigators, are also of high caste status.

<i>Village</i>	<i>Main Property Holding</i>	<i>Dominant caste according to investigation</i>	<i>Local caste status</i>
(1) Kisan Garhi (U.P.) (Marriot)	Jats and Brahmans	Jats	High
(2) Rani Khera (U.P.) (Lewis)	Jats own all the land of the village	Jats	High
(3) Madhopur (U.P.) (Cohn)	Thakurs own 70% of culturable land	Thakurs	High
(4) Karimpur (U.P.) (Wiser)	Brahmans own practically all the land	Brahmans	High
(5) Senapur (U.P.) (Opler & Singh)	The Kshatriyas own most of the land and are the wealthiest	Kshatriyas	High
(6) Kasandra (Steed)	The Rajputs are the richest, they own most of the land	Rajputs	High

⁴ Report on the Punjab 1881 pp. 172-6; Quoted in Risley's *'People of India'* p. 414.

	Village	Main Property Holding	Dominant caste according to investigation	Local caste status
(7)	Bisipara (Orissa) (Bailey)	Warrior Caste and Boad distillers	Warrior Caste	High
(8)	Kumbapettai (Tanjore) (Gough)	Brahmans	Brahmans	High
(9)	North Keralan village (Miller)	Nayars	Nayars	High
(10)	Shamirpet (Andhra) (Dube)	Reddis	Reddis	High
(11)	Malwa village in Dewas (Mayer)	Rajputs	Rajputs	High
(12)	Bengal village (Sharma)	Brahmans and Kayasthas	Brahmans	High

In these 12 cases the dominant caste, the sole main property holding caste, invariably occupies a high caste status. We shall, however, see in the following pages how other 'clean' castes are improving their economic positions and are at places moving forward to challenge the dominance of the present dominant castes.

It is interesting to note that a caste dominant in a village occupies in the absence of a relatively great amount of wealth in another village a lower caste position ritually. In the two Uttar Pradesh villages of Kisan Garhi and Rani Khera the Jats are the dominant castes and are ranked as high castes ritually. In other villages in the Uttar Pradesh the caste ranking of the Jat is relatively low, being classed with the Ahirs and the Gujars in the middle range and with whom they smoke together.⁵

Whereas we have not detailed information about the amount of property held in these other villages—in the two villages their high ritual rank coincides with the fact that they are the main holders of property.

The second fact that seems to emerge from the village studies is that the formerly dominant caste is being increasingly challenged by other castes in the village who, in recent times, have improved their economic position particularly with respect to land holding.

⁵ Blunt, *"Caste System of Northern India"*, p. 98.

In most cases these castes have not yet replaced or become equal with the local dominant caste. The former monopoly in land is broken generally. At Kisan Garhi Marriot says, "The Brahman tenants, now superior to the old landlords in their land rights and in the aggregate of their possessions, are trying to organise their own effective dominance over the village."⁶

Where another caste has not grown to be a rival in economic power, as in the other Jat village of Rani Khera studied by Lewis, the dominant Jat caste is both ritually and politically more secure and the older village relations less changed. In the Tanjore village of Kumbapettai, however, studied by Gough, the Brahmans monopolized the holding of land. This monopoly has gone and a number of merchant castes have bought land and have generally increased their wealth. They are the leading elements in the anti-Brahman agitation in the area.⁷ In the Rajasthan village of Fatehpura studied by Carstairs the merchant caste is emerging more and more as a rival to the traditional dominant Rajputs.⁸ In the Mysore village of Hattarahalli studied by Beals the formerly dominant Lingayats were ousted from political office (the post of the headman) and a member of the landowning cultivator Kuruba caste was elected to the post supported by other intermediate castes whose economic power had developed latterly.⁹ Again, in the Gujarati village of Kasandra studied by Steed the merchant caste by reason of its recently improved economic position was now esteemed to be ritually almost as high as the Rajput overlords.¹⁰ Despite this rise, the Rajputs of course are still classed by Steed as dominant.

In the Orissan village of Bisipara the land monopoly of the Warrior caste has been broken. A formerly low caste of Boad Distillers having made money by the sale of liquor bought up land which the Warriors had to part with due to changes in circumstances which we shall note below. The Board Distillers now appear to be ritually almost as high as the Warriors in the eyes of the village people.

⁶ *"India's Villages"*, p. 103.

⁷ *"India's Villages"*, p. 82.

⁸ *"India's Villages"*, p. 36.

⁹ *"India's Villages"*, pp. 142, 143.

¹⁰ *"Village India"*, p. 118.

In all these cases we note that castes other than the former dominant caste have increased their wealth (particularly in land) and have often advanced in ritual status. In some cases of course there is resistance offered to such higher status claims as in the case of the Ramkheri Telis (cf. Ch. 1).

In some cases they are challenging the dominance of the dominant group. In one case in the Mysore village of Hatherahalli they actually ousted it from political office. There thus appears to be a certain correlation between ritual status and wealth.

The background to the emergence of new wealthier castes seems in all these cases to be the following: The arrival of the British administration and later on the post-British administration which broke the monopoly of political power of the former dominant caste. There was thus now a different court of appeal outside the jurisdiction of the dominant caste wherever the administration arrived. Thus the Ganjam Distillers of Bisipara had contacts not with the Village Council but with the administration. The Boad outcastes referred disputes which would formerly have been settled by a village council controlled by the dominant caste, to the police instead.¹¹

Thus whilst the administration may have on the one hand buttressed the authority of the dominant caste, on the other hand it also weakened it in this way. In former times all disputes including disputes between itself and others were settled by the dominant caste. Now the court of appeal and the accompanying sanctions were largely removed out of its control. It lost political power to an increasing extent. It was unable to control in its own interests certain new economic developments such as the new opportunities afforded to work outside the village, the development of new occupations, the change-over to cash payment instead of in kind. The arrival of the administration was followed by the tying up of the village with the outside economy to an increasing degree. This led to new sources of earning wealth and to new avenues of employment. At Kisan Garhi village the artisans, menials and landless labourers have been forced by poverty or lack of land to emigrate outside the village and seek work elsewhere.¹²

¹¹ *Bailey* op. cit. p. 223.

¹² *India's Villages*, p. 100.

In the other Jat village of Rani Khera in the U.P., some of the Jat families no longer cultivate their land and their children have become school-teachers or taken miscellaneous jobs in Delhi. Brahmans leaving their priestly functions have taken to selling, tailoring, cultivating and occupancy tenancy. Chamars have left off skinning dead animals. In the Tanjore village of Kumbapettai two Toddy-tappers, one Potter and five Konans (tenant cultivators) have started cultivating their own land. Three non-Brahmans have set up tea shops. Two have set up small grocery shops in the village. Two men work for wages in a nearby cigar factory. In the Rajasthani village of Fatehpura the merchant caste has seized hold of the expanded opportunity for trade to enrich itself. The formerly low ranking Yadav caste has abandoned its traditional leather work for stone-masonry and factory employment. The former stone-caste of Daryas have now opened tea-shops, cycle-stores and taken to jobs in the towns. They have now risen in ritual status. In the Mysore village of Hatharahalli¹³ the transportation and communication system and the growing trade, which has developed, has provided new occupations, often in Bangalore City. In the Telugu village of Shamirpet¹⁴ people are now taking to new occupations. A goldsmith has opened a tea shop. Washermen and menial caste men are taking up jobs in the City of Hyderabad. All this has freed many from the traditional economy. In the Orissan village of Bisipara practically the whole village is engaged in the trade with the town. In addition jobs are now offered to them by a tobacco leaf company. Jobs, again, are available in government construction work as well as in teaching and in administrative posts.

The availability of new avenues of employment and acquiring wealth further weakened the position of the former dominant castes. Not only was their control over the others lessened, but other castes could now grow in wealth and increasingly challenge their position. Side by side with this there has been often a decline in the prosperity of the former dominant castes. The Warrior caste of Bisipara, the Brahman landlords of Kumbapettai, the Rajputs of Fatehpura, the Jats of Kisan Garhi have all lost land and wealth. Sometimes this has been due to partition of joint pro-

¹³ *India's Villages*. p. 19 seq.

¹⁴ Dube; *Indian Village*. p. 212 seq.

perty by the heirs; to lost law suits in the law courts, which courts increasingly usurped the function of the former caste council; to increased taxes or to having to pay taxes in cash on a market where the price fluctuated; to selling off some land in order to reside in the town—for a variety of reasons. The following table shows how widespread has been this change in property holding in the U.P.

GAINS AND LOSSES OF LAND 1907-8 TO 1925-6

<i>Caste or Caste group.</i>	<i>Area.</i> (Thousands of acres: 000s omitted)		
	1907-8	1925-6	<i>Difference</i>
Rajput	... 16,341	16,230	— 111
Muslim	... 8,963	8,532	— 431
Brahman	... 8,095	8,366	+ 291
Bhuhinhar and Tagas			
Other agricultural castes	... 3,762	3,909	+ 147
Non-agricultural castes	... 6,948	7,602	+ 654 *

[* It will be noticed that in this table gains amount to 1,072,000 acres against losses of 542,000 acres only. The explanation is that the figures were taken out only for certain castes in the last two categories, i.e. for agricultural castes, the Ahar, Ahir, Bishnoi, Gujar, Jat and Kurmi; for non-agricultural castes, Goshain, Kalwar, Kandu, Kayastha, Khatkul, Marwari, Sadh and Vaisya.

Rajputs and Muslims have lost heavily. The gains have gone to the professional moneylenders, a considerable part to the Brahmans and the richer agriculturists, notably Kurmis, amongst whom there are many amateur moneylenders.^{15]}

The increasing economic ties which developed with the outside world after the arrival of the administration had a large number of effects on the village.

The village became dependent for such objects of consumption as lanterns, oil, scissors, matches, cloth, domestic utensils and so on. From the village went out its products—grain, vegetables,

¹⁵ Blunt: *op. cit.* pp. 270, 271.

hides etc. to the outside world. The Ganjam Distillers and the merchants of Kumbapettai in Tanjore, of Kasandra in Gujarat engaged in this trade. In Bisipara the whole village engaged in the turmeric trade. This trade was also a part of the process, as we have seen, of opening up of new occupations to the village people.

In the Telugu village of Shamirpet there were imports of aluminium and 'German Silver' utensils, glasses, china cups, kerosine lanterns, safety razors, electric torches, cheap fountain pens, fruit drops, biscuits, tea, mill made cloth and so on. Many of the tools and utensils now imported had supplanted or were supplanting the wares made by local artisans. Wiser notes this in the U.P. village of Karimpur.¹⁶ Gough notes this in Kumbapettai in Tanjore. Beals mentions it in the Mysore village of Hattarahalli. There was and is thus also a process of the ruining of village crafts. Former craftsmen take either to agricultural work or leave for outside employment. This disturbed and broke down to a varying extent the old occupational structure of the village. The village becomes increasingly tied to the larger society. The educated upper castes of Bisipara, of Rani Khera, of Madhopur in the U.P., of Kumbapettai also start leaving for the towns. When they returned from time to time they brought in an influx of new ideas and ways, which again were to the detriment of the old standards upheld by the previously economically dominant caste group.

The third fact to note was the relatively unchanged position of the untouchables. Elsewhere changes of a varying magnitude had taken place in the life of the village. Castes other than the dominant castes had grown richer and politically more powerful, had risen in status, but the Untouchable remained in ritual status where he had been.

The Chamars of Madhopur village in the U.P. have been trying to raise their social status. They stopped eating carrion and beef and refused to do what they considered degrading work like carrying manure to the fields. But says Cohn, "As for inspiring greater respect from the higher castes, such changes of caste behaviour receive at best a passive recognition, certainly not approval".¹⁷

¹⁶ *Hindu Jajmani System*, p. 144.

¹⁷ *Village India*, p. 73.

Cohn goes on to describe similar attempts by other untouchables: "Chamars are not alone in trying to elevate their caste status. Fifteen years ago representatives of most of the Bhars of Karaket Tehsil met to plan ways to raise their status. Several educated Bhars, who were government officials, addressed the meeting and told them that they were lowly and despised because they raised pigs. The Bhars gave up pig-raising, yet it is difficult to say that they have improved their status in the eyes of other castes. They are still regarded as "untouchable", although they are held in better regard than are the Khatiks and Pasis of the area, who still herd swine.

The Boad outcastes of Bisipara in Orissa took to trading in hides. Some of them made money and the economic position of the caste as a whole improved. When, however, they tried to get over the pollution barrier they met with concerted resistance from the rest of the village. They were not allowed to enter the village temple, nor to build houses outside their area. The treatment meted out to the Boad outcastes is in sharp contrast to the higher status accorded to the once lowly Boad distillers, who have now also acquired wealth. It seems, then, that in caste Hindu society the acquisition of wealth is not sufficient to guarantee a higher status. The factor of being above or below the pollution line is also taken into consideration. The Boad outcastes were divided on the issue as to what to do. One group advocated adopting higher caste modes, the other said that that was useless and wanted a clean break and go out of the system altogether.

The experience of the Adi Dravidas of Kumbarpettai in Tanjore was similar. Certain non-Brahman castes rose in ritual status. This can be correlated with an increase in their wealth. But the low status of the untouchable castes—the Adi Dravidas—remained unchanged. Thus, while the upper non-Brahman castes can now eat in special rooms in Brahman restaurants, the untouchable Adi Dravidas are debarred. At tea shops the untouchable Pallans can drink tea, but from separate glasses. The Adi Dravidas went in for a period of imbibing Sanskritic culture, for instance, attending the festivals of Sanskritic deities. They seem to think now that this is not of much use to them for these festivals are not so

popular with them now.¹⁸ Untouchability remains—in spite of all the other changes in all the villages whose field studies have been mentioned in the preceding pages. In Hatharahalli the former dominant Lingayat caste was ousted from political power, other castes like the Kuruba rose in ritual status, but the position of the Madiga untouchables remained the same. They remained untouchable. What seems to emerge from this analysis is that untouchability is a deep rooted phenomena in Hindu society and thought. Untouchables all over India (as we shall see later) have tried to change their ways, their marriage practices and caste names, but to what effect? Untouchability has been made a legal offence also by the Act of Parliament recently, nevertheless it cannot be said that it does not persist. It remains a barrier over which neither increased numbers or greater wealth in the present circumstances can climb. This is the area where correlation between caste status and economic power or wealth does not exist.

A similar area, where this correlation does not seem to exist, is the position of the Brahman. In the village studies quoted above there is a variety of circumstances in which the Brahman caste finds itself. At Karimpur in the U.P., studied by Wiser, he is not only ritually dominant, but also dominant in the secular field, in politics and in the holding of property. This is the case in Kumbapettai in Tanjore. At Kisan Garhi the Brahman is seizing secular power from the dominant Jat caste. In Fatehpura in Rajasthan the Brahmans are a poverty stricken lot without much secular power. But propertied or not propertied, the Brahman like the untouchable remains what he was—in his case ritually the highest, at the opposite pole of the untouchable. This position he holds irrespective of his wealth.

Subject to the limitations pointed out above with respect to the position of the Brahmans and the Untouchables there also seems to exist a correlation between wealth and ritual status in these village studies. Is this correlation borne out on a wider field? The Government of India recently conducted a survey of rural manpower in India¹⁹ in which it also surveyed the relation between property holding and castes. The following figures from

¹⁸ *Village India*, pp. 49, 50.

¹⁹ Government of India: '*Rural Manpower and Occupational Structure*' Ministry of Labour, 1954.

this survey seem to suggest a correlation between wealth and ritual status.

In the Uttar Pradesh 55% of the agricultural workers families belonged to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. 22.5% belonged to castes described as backward. On the other hand, says the survey, only 10.7% of the Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas belonged to the category of agricultural workers. The Survey has used the 'Varna' terminology and has not specified who are being included in the Vaishya category. The implication, however, is clear—these castes are the ritually upper castes of the various regions. In other words 9 out of 10 of these upper castes possessed either land or were in occupations other than that of agricultural labour (in trade, profession, government service), whereas almost 8 out of 10 of the scheduled and backward castes and tribes were landless or almost landless labourers. The contrast between the two is sharp.

In West Bengal 52% of the agricultural workers' families belonged to the scheduled castes and tribes and backward classes. In this category the Brahmans constituted 0.4%, the Kayastha families 11.8% and the Vaishyas 2.5%. The difference is fairly clear here also.

We get a more detailed breakdown with respect to some West Bengal villages from R. K. Mukherji's 'Dynamics of Rural Society' (pp. 96 seq.).

His tables confirm the Rural Manpower and Occupational Survey in more detail. Economic Class I which is the highest economic class contains the majority of the High Caste Hindus (61% of the Caste Hindus) the lowest economic class, Class III, contains the majority of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

In the Punjab 82% of the agricultural labourers belonged to the scheduled castes and tribes and 5% of them were Brahmans and Kshatriyas. The survey here gives statistics of landholders; 79% of the owners were Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Sikhs.

In Saurashtra 72% of the landowners were Vaishyas whilst 18.6% of the landowners belonged to the backward classes.

In Vindhya Pradesh 84% of the Brahmans' families are land-owners, 89% of the Kshatriyas and 49% of the Vaishyas. On

the other hand 90% of the agricultural workers belong to the scheduled castes.

In Mysore the report says:

"The Brahmans were mostly landowners. The rest were businessmen, salaried employees etc. Two thirds of the Vaishyas were agricultural owners and one-third agricultural workers.²⁰ Only 13.2% of scheduled castes and tribes, aboriginals and backward classes were landowners. Most of them, the Report states, were agricultural or non-agricultural workers.

Mayer gives a breakdown for Malabar in 'Land and Society in Malabar'.²¹ Of the two Janmis (landlords) owning over 90% of the land in Chunangad, one is a Nambudri (a Brahman) family, and the other is the Zamorin of Calicut, the foremost Raja of pre-British days. 'Kanam' interests are almost entirely in the hands of the Naiks (the 2nd caste in the hierarchy) who number 22 out of the 25 large Kanamdars. Some of these Kanamdars cultivate their lands through hired labour and tied Cheramas. Many others lease all or part of their holdings to cultivating Verumpattamdars, who are mostly Tiyas, and a few Moplas. The casual labour is drawn from landless Tiyas and Cheramas (low caste people). In Chunangad, then, the scale of land interests mirrors faithfully the caste hierarchy.

In Erimayur, 6 out of the 8 largest janmis are members of the Zamorins family or Nambudris who are managers of temple trusts (ibid, p. 96). This is the condition in South Malabar. In North Malabar conditions are different. There are very few Nambudris there. Many so called Nambudris are landless Brahmans from Canara who work in temples, and are sometimes small and relatively poor janmis. Instead it is the Nayars who have extensive janmam holdings. But there are also many small janmis—Nayars, Tiyas and Moplas (ibid., p. 97).

Though the figures vary according to the status, they tend to show that agricultural labour is mainly performed by scheduled castes and tribes and the backward castes, and that the bulk of landed property is conversely held by the upper castes.

This fairly wide survey of the caste composition of agricultural workers and of the landowners does tend to show that we can

²⁰ *Rural Manpower and Occupational Survey*. p. 243.

²¹ *Land and Society in Malabar*: Oxford University Press 1952.

suggest that there exists a correlation between high caste status and property holding. However, as pointed out before, a more detailed examination of the social structure would also indicate certain limits to this correlation. Mayer notes that in North Malabar many so-called Nambudris "are landless Brahmans from Canara, who work in temples, and are sometimes small and relatively poor janmis" (op. cit. p. 97).

This seems to be a feature of other areas also and we shall note in Chapter 8 cases of poor Rajputs in the Punjab and the Central Provinces.

We may now turn to another aspect of the question of wealth—its correlation with political power. There are various levels of political power in Indian society past and present with a variety of forms, which we shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter. On the village level, the main organs of political power are headmanship, membership of the village council, membership of the caste council if it dominated the village.

In the village studies quoted, the Jats of Kisan Garhi and of Rani Khera, the Thakurs of Madhopur, the Brahmans of Karimpur, the Rajputs of Kasandra, the Brahmans of Kumbapattai, the Nayars of Miller's North Keralan village, the Reddis of Shamirpet and the Warrior Caste of Bisipara all dominate the political scene by their hold of political power and are the main landed castes as well. The correlation between wealth and political power is apparent here. The power held by these castes is, as we have seen being increasingly challenged by the newly rising middle groups, like the Kurubas of the Mysore village of Hatharahalli, who captured the headmanship from the former dominant Lingayat caste. With the new legislation of elections to the village council based on adult franchise, the struggle for political power is to quite an extent centering round elections to these bodies, as well as to the new organs of higher political power like the state and central legislatures. In Madhopur village in the U.P., the Rajput Thakurs had ruled the village and the Taluka surrounding it. Within the village, four or five Thakurs were recognised by all the castes as informal village headmen of the whole village. Occasionally they sat together as a village panchayat. They tended to be selected from leading Thakur families. "The actual selection of informal

headmen shifted over the years along with changing economic fortunes and changing personalities in the several lineages. Behind each informal headman and his family was the physical power of those tenants and servants who could be depended upon to follow him, with quarter staff in hand, if necessary. Either through fear, through satisfaction with the system, or ignorance of alternative systems, Chamars and other low-caste people were quiet and followed the political leadership of their Thakur overlords."²²

On the Taluka level each of the heads of the hereditary divisions of the Taluka met as a panchayat to discuss and arbitrate on matters of interest to the Thakurs themselves and to the taluka. Then came the elections to the new councils (panchayats) in 1948. A party of the lower castes was formed called the 'Tenant' Party. Seeing that the Tenant Party would win the elections, the Thakurs refused to participate in the election. The lower castes' Tenant party succeeded in electing both a village council and a rural court wholly made up of its own candidates and sympathisers, including Chamars. The Village Council, however, could not prevail against the economic boycott of the Thakurs and the higher castes. Court action against them proved too expensive. The village council could not even collect the taxes. The Thakurs then bribed some of the leaders of the Tenant Party. Lacking the necessary economic base for a long term fight against the Thakurs on whom they were dependent for a livelihood, the political power of the low-castes organised in the Tenant Party collapsed after some time.²³ Clearly the possession of wealth affects political power. The converse is also true. In the Mysore village cited, it was important for the newly wealthy middle groups to capture the headmanship of the village from the formerly dominant Lingayats in order to consolidate their position and seek further expansion. Gough points out how the anti-Brahman agitation in Tanjore is initiated mainly by the newly rich middle castes.²⁴

Srinivas also makes the same point with respect to the anti-Brahman Dravida Khizagam movement in the Mysore village of Rampura.²⁵

²² *Village India*, p. 65.

²³ *Village India*, p. 72.

²⁴ *India's Villages*, p. 92.

²⁵ *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 61, Number 1, Feb. 1959, p. 1 seq.

In the Orissan village of Bisipara the rising caste of Distillers now sit in the village council.²⁶

In the U.P. village of Kisan Garhi the Brahmans have emerged as the economic rivals of the formerly dominant Jat caste. The village council is now dominated by the Brahmans, but meets with such opposition from the others, that it has neither been able to collect half its small tax or a fraction of the fines it has imposed.²⁷

The Brahmans of Kisan Garhi in contrast to the Tenant Party of Madhopur, nevertheless, seem to be holding on. The difference in the two situations seems to arise from the fact that here the Brahmans are large landowners, whereas Madhopur's low castes were not. The attempts by these newly rising middle groups to get political power in these various areas indicates the significance political power has for them. Wealth by itself will not give caste dominance. For that political power is also necessary. Where wealthy middle groups have not achieved this as, in the Gujarati village of Kasandra,²⁸ they cannot yet be called the dominant caste.

The village studies, cited, give evidence of this correlation between wealth and political power. Such detailed breakdowns regarding the correlation of wealth and political power are not easy to get on an All-India scale.

The Census of India, 1891, groups a number of castes together under the heading 'Military and Dominant'. This list excludes both the priestly and merchant categories. Dominant would then seem to imply secular dominance and not ritual dominance, and not only economical dominance but also political dominance, (as the merchants are not included in the group). We have seen the figures for the caste composition of property holders in the 'Rural Manpower Survey' of the Government of India (1951). The two surveys, it is true belong to two different periods. Nevertheless the politically dominant of 1891 were still largely the property holders of 1951. According to the U.P. Banking Enquiry Report (1930) (Vol. I, pp. 125-6) the largest owners of land in the U.P. in 1907-8 were in order the Rajputs, the Muslims and the Brahmans. In 1891 the Census definitely classifies the Rajputs as

²⁶ Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier*: p. 191 seq.

²⁷ *India's Villages*. p. 107.

²⁸ *Village India*. p. 118.

a politically dominant caste in the U.P. Thus, if we examine the case of the U.P., the Rajput caste, according to the Census of 1891 and the data for 1907-8 of the Banking Enquiry Committee, were generally large landowners as well as a politically dominant group. In the Rural Manpower Survey the non-Brahman, non-Kshatriya castes are designated by the 'Varna' term 'Vaishya'. If we understand by that term the non-priestly and non-military castes, who have achieved a relatively high caste status, we would find as we have seen in the preceding pages, that they are also considerable property owners, particularly in an area like Gujarat. In Northern India it is these propertied Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya groups who are designated as the Twice-Born. Tradition holds that castes who are military and dominant are included among the Kshatriya Varna among the Twice-Born. The politically dominant was called the Kshatriya. The Rural Manpower Survey shows that the Kshatriya groups were still economically dominant in 1951. There does seem, then, to exist a certain amount of evidence to show that a general correlation between economic and political power has and does exist on an all-India plane. The detailed village studies indicate it on the village level.

The political power which a caste holds in any area would seem to vary with its wealth. The case of the Jats furnishes an interesting example. We noted that in some of the U.P. villages studied the Jat is the dominant caste, in others according to Blunt they are an intermediate cultivation class below the Rajputs and classed with the Ahirs and Gujars.²⁹ This is the case in Rajasthan and the Punjab also. Ibbetson says that when certain Jats rise in political and economic power they arrogate to themselves the title of Rajputs, the distinction between them now being social rather than ethnic.³⁰ He holds that Rajput and Jat belong to the same social stock. He also says that a reverse process holds true, that many a present Jat is a degraded Rajput (*Ibid.*, p. 365). If this be true then it is a striking contrast to the position of both the Brahman and the Untouchable. As we have discussed before the Brahman, propertied or not, remains ritually the highest caste. As a matter of fact traditionally one of his attributes was his poverty, his 'simple living and high thinking'. In Bisipara the

²⁹ *Caste System of Northern India*, p. 98.

³⁰ *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and the NWFP* Vol. II, p. 364.

Village Council dismissed the local village priest and thereby showed his lack of temporal power. But the upstart caste of Boad Distillers, who were represented in the Village Council and perhaps voted for this Brahman's removal, nevertheless would not take food or water from anyone, not even the Warrior Caste except from the Brahmans. We have also seen how the untouchable remains the untouchable whether he becomes wealthy or not.

It would then seem that the correlation between caste status and property holding and political power exists between two limits — that of Brahmanhood and Untouchability. Why it does not hold good beyond these limits, what factors correlate with the Brahman's high ritual status (and the Untouchable's low ritual status) will be the subject of discussion in a later chapter.

From the village studies the fact emerged that untouchable castes, whether they achieve wealth or not, cannot cross the untouchability line, let alone achieve high caste status. A sufficient minimum of caste status is necessary to rise still higher in the caste hierarchy. The Boad Distillers of Bisipara are on the way to challenging the dominance of the local Warrior Caste, but the Boad Outcastes in spite of this recent prosperity, cannot get out of their outcaste status, let alone achieve a high one. Their inability to cross the Pollution Barrier rules out the possibility of their becoming dominant in the village, unless it is by sheer naked dictatorial force against a non-co-operating body of other castes. The failure of the Chamars of Madhopur to retain political power, even after winning the elections to the village council against the Rajputs, is another example. The Rajputs could organise a boycott against them but the Chamars could not get the other castes to co-operate with them and boycott the Rajputs. In none of the villages studied have the untouchables, in spite of various social changes, been able to achieve touchable status, let alone a dominant status. In this sense Srinivas's formulation, that a caste to become dominant must have at least a certain minimum of status to start with, seems to be borne out. It has yet to be seen whether a caste, which has been recently untouchable, has achieved a high caste status, let alone a dominant status.

We have seen that economically and politically dominant castes have actually a high caste rank. Stevenson says that a high caste

rank is due to the observance of the ritual rules and regulations flowing from the Pollution Concept.³¹ The more strict the adherence to these rules and regulations, the higher the caste ranking. Is that so? Do dominant castes, which are in rank high castes observe these rules strictly, more so than castes ranked ritually below them? The facts generally are to the contrary. What are some of the characteristics of these dominant castes? How are they organised? Do they belong to one body? How do they achieve prestige? What is their relation to the Brahmans?

Let us examine these questions in the next two chapters.

³¹ Stevenson, op. cit. p. 62.

Chapter 8

THE DOMINANT CASTE (I)

INVESTIGATIONS OF HINDU Caste Society has shown that there is domination by the clean castes as a whole against the untouchables, and that amongst the clean castes there are certain families belonging to one or more castes, who are rated by local society as higher than the others. These groups have been termed 'dominant'. As we have discussed in the first chapter the use of the term 'dominant caste' does not imply that every member belonging to that local caste is equally powerful in a secular sense. Ibbetson points out how in some cases, where their disparity develops, fission takes place.¹ He points out how poor Rajputs, who have taken to ploughing, have lost their status as Rajputs and other Rajputs refuse to have social relations with them (*ibid.*, pp. 174-176). Blunt also points out the same process.² "The formation of new sub-castes by fission is now, as always, going on every day" (p. 50). The causes may vary. He enumerates some of the causes—change of locality, occupation, social or religious customs, pollution and change due to the increased prosperity of one group of families, and cites the example of the Sainthwar sub-caste of the Kurmis.

In the Central Indian village of Ramkheri, studied by Mayer, a number of Rajput families are relatively poor compared to their wealthier caste brothers, but possess a higher caste status than they would otherwise have done due to their connections with their secularly more powerful caste brothers.³

The Boad Distillers of Bisipara studied by Bailey were, as Distillers, formerly a low caste. Having prospered materially they are severing connections with their former caste brothers. We have also seen that in any village or locality there may not be families from one caste group holding undisputed domination over the area concerned. Particularly nowadays with the recent social and economic changes taking place there is often a struggle for

¹ Report on the Punjab Census of 1881, pp. 2, 176.

² *Caste System of Northern India*, pp. 50, 55.

³ Mayer, *The Dominant Caste in a Region of Central India*, South Western Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 14, No. 4, Winter 1958, p. 425.

secular power between different powerful groups, for instance, as we have seen, the Brahmans of Kisan Garhi in the U.P., who are challenging the formerly dominant Jats. As long as fusion between two such contending groups do not take place such a sharing of power would, it seems, be temporary, to be resolved ultimately in favour of one group or another. The concept of dominance has also to be related to the level of secular power concerned. During Moghul times the Muslim emperor ruled at the top. Below them they might have had Hindu feudatories like the Rajput prince Man Singh. In their administration they might have traders like Todar Mall, as did Akbar. Hindu princes used Brahmans like Kautilya or the Maharashtrian Peshwa. Groups dominating may have varied from place to place, Rajputs in one case, Jats in another, Brahmans in a third. Political changes in the shape of adult franchise and elected village and local councils have recently been introduced in rural India, but prior to that, the institution of headmanship may be taken as a measure of the political and economic power of a caste in the village. The headman, for instance, in Dewas senior state in the Maharaja's time was his representative in the village. He collected the land tax, reported serious breaches of law and order, and acted as the link between the state and the villagers. He initiated and controlled the major village festivals. The headman was 'primus inter pares' among his caste fellows. His appointment in the final resort, it seems, was sanctioned by the Maharaja. Thus if we take headmanship as an indication of the political power on the village level we get the following table for the Dewas senior state, which was investigated by Mayer.⁴

(Dewas was ruled by two brothers—the elder ruling Dewas Senior.)

<i>Caste</i>	<i>No. of villages.</i>	
	<i>In which headman</i>	<i>In which present</i>
Rajput	.. 7	8
Kalota	... 4	5
Naita Muslim	... 3	4
Dakkad	... 2	4

⁴ Mayer, *The Dominant Caste in a Region of Central India*, South Western Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 14, No. 4, Winter 1958, p. 418.

Caste	No. of villages.	
	In which headman	In which present
Gujar	2	2
Kumawat	1	6
Brahman	2	17
Kheti	4	9
Ahir	3	4
	<hr/> 28 * <hr/>	

It seems that in this area castes with headmen are generally those having a large population in a few villages. Thus the Kalota are present in only 5 villages but have an average of 32.0 households per village, the Dakkad an average of 23.0 in 4 villages, the Rajput an average of 23.0 in 8 villages, the Kheti of 21.0 in 9 villages, the Naita Muslim average 17.0 households in 4 villages. The Brahmans at the other extreme are present in 17 villages with an average of 4 households per village and have only 2 headmen. The untouchable Balai are present in 24 villages with an average of 13.5 households per village. The Chamars are present in 18 villages with an average of 10 households per village. In a few special Balai villages the State rulers appointed Balai headmen. The Chamars have no headmen at all. Mayer states that these castes possessing headmanship form a cluster of castes with the Rajputs, with whom they are reciprocally commensal; and are mainly agricultural in occupation. They are separated from each other by endogamy.

These castes Mayer groups as allied castes. They are, as he says, agriculture-centred castes. This agrees essentially with what has been said before, that the primary stratification in Indian villages is between the touchable and the untouchable castes, specifically between the peasants and artisans and the serf-like labourers. Later on we shall see that there is good reason to suppose that the origins of the Rajput and the farming Jats in North Western India, of the cultivating Kunbis and the more aristocratic Marathas, with whom the former have commensal and

* Villagers have 2 headmen of different castes.

marriage relations, are probably the same. In Mehra while the Rajputs in Ramkhari village possess on an average of 21.76 acres, the Chamars have 0.20 acres and the Balai 3.05 acres. In the political sphere the Chamars and Balai, until the recent introduction of adult franchise and elected village councils, were also bereft of local political power. Historical accounts show that the Balais were a local tribe before the occupation of this area by the allied castes. The coincidence of economic and political power is apparent.

Let us take the next levels of political power in this area. At the top was the Maratha prince. Of the 24 nobles, to whom the revenue from certain villages had been given as personal income, 10 were Marathas, 7 were Rajputs, the rest were Brahmans, Prabhus, Mahajans and Bhilalas. The administration of the area was carried on by a civil service drawn from the nobles and reputable families, and was mainly in the hands of Maratha caste people and Maharashtrian Brahmans. In so far as the Rajputs were concerned their main part in the administration was a link between the officials in the town and the villages. They were powerful to the extent that they were dominant in the local area. Out of a total of 28 villages surveyed by Mayer they were present in only 8 villages. Out of these 8 villages in 7 the headman was a Rajput. Nevertheless the Rajput caste in Dewas Senior (the area surveyed) was numerically the most populous. In Ramkhari village, to which we have referred, they were second in size. The number of households per village occupied by them is 23.0. Their average land holding is about 21.76 acres in Ramkhari village.⁵ Thus the pattern of Rajput settlement in Dewas is concentration in a relatively few villages—about one village in three where they occupy practically all the land. People in this area do not hold land outside their villages generally. In other villages there are other groups which dominate by reason of their ownership of land and political power in a similar fashion with a similar relationship to the State.

The picture that emerges with respect to Dewas Senior State seems to be as follows : There were first the tribal Balais. Then came the settlement by the 'allied castes'. The central political

⁵ Mayer, *Some Hierarchical Aspects of Caste*, S.W. Journal, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1956, p. 134.

power on the state level was in the hands of the Rajputs. Locally a number of different 'allied castes' may have been dominant. Then Muslim state power replaced Rajput state power. After the Muslims came the Marathas, who put their own nominees—Marathas, Brahmans, Prabhus, etc.—into the central administration and the majority of the jagirdaris into the hands of Maratha nobles. The Marathas did not go below this on to the village level. Here the Rajputs, Kalotas, Dakkads, Ahirs and Gujars, whom Mayer calls the allied castes, dominated. There is thus not one single dominant caste in the Dewas Senior area; neither on the local nor on the state and regional levels. This is not an isolated case in Indian society.

Let us now examine some examples from the Uttar Pradesh area.

THE UTTAR PRADESH

Studying the dominant Rajput caste of the village of Gohana near Lucknow in the U.P., Dr. Majumdar and his colleagues discovered these facts among others. About 300 years ago Saadat Khan, the then Governor of Oudh, declared himself independent of the Moghul Crown and set himself up as the local ruler. Delhi sent an army under the Rajput Chauhan Thakur of Chamrai village in the Mainpuri District, to crush their rebellion. Chauhan Thakur succeeded in conquering 52 villages, but later instead of finishing his assignment, settled down in Kathvara village, nearby. Before his death he divided these 52 villages into 3 equal shares in area among his three sons. The eldest son got 32 villages in his share, the second 12 and the third got 8. The second son with 12 villages, Thakur Bach Raj Singh, took up his residence in Mangat village, 2 miles away from Gohana. He had three sons who inherited 4 villages each from him. The youngest son, Thakur Chandra Sen Singh took up his residence in Gohana. The present Chauhan families of Gohana (20 out of 22 Thakur families here are Chauhans) are descendants of Chandra Sen Singh Chauhan. From the eldest son of Bach Raj Singh, Thakur Bhim Sen, are reputed to be descended the Chauhans of Manipur. This seniority is disputed by the Chauhans of Nandana village, who claim that their ancestor Thakur Phursat Singh was the eldest brother and that they are the seniormost lineage. The Thakurs

of Gohana, however, support the Mainpur Thakurs in their claim to seniority. As a mark of protest the Thakurs of Nandana abstain from the joint Holi celebrations held annually at Mainpur, where assemble the Thakurs of the other 10 villages.⁶

We have here then an area covering 52 villages which is dominated by Rajputs, who are interrelated. Opler and Singh describe a similar area in the U.P.—Dhobi Taluka.⁷

The Thakurs of Senapur village, which they studied, trace their ancestors back to a Ganesh Rai, during the reign of the Moghul King Akbar. Ganesh Rai started out from Birsinghpur, Sultanpur district, eastwards and took the fortress at Hariharpur. From here his descendants occupied an area of fourteen square miles—Dhobi Taluka and became the dominant group. Ganesh Rai had two sons, Ishwardas and Ramdeo. Ishwardas had 4 sons and Ramdeo 8. Thus the 4 sons of Ishwardas had more to divide than their cousins. In this way the Thakurs of Senapur explain why they have relatively large landholdings in other villages of Dhobi Taluka. The eldest son of Ishwardas was Madhoram who founded the village of Senapur.

The lands of those who trace descent from one of these 12 grandsons of Ganesh Rai are known as a Mohal. There are 12 Mohals in Dhobi Taluka and they form the structural basis for an assembly of the Dhobi Thakurs, a formerly powerful panchayat. We have thus a single Rajput caste, who are interrelated, dominating an area covering 100 villages. The Thakurs of Senapur belong to the Raghuvamsa. They aspire to marry their daughters to the superior Chauhan, Bishwen or Batsgoti clans. Other clans inferior to them in Rajput status aspire to marry their daughters to the sons of the Senapur Thakur. Often the system becomes one of taking brides from the east and getting bridegrooms in the west. Thus in certain parts of eastern U.P. the Thakur brides are coming from Bihar. A network of such kinship and official relationships seems to exist among the Rajputs of the Ganges plains. We can see similar systems in other Rajput areas also.

⁶D. N. Majumdar, *Rural Analysis Problems and prospects in Society in India*, p. 134 seq. Pubd. SSA Publications Book Centre, Madras, India.

⁷Chapple and Coon, ed. *General Reader in Anthropology* p. 468 seq.

There are in Dhobi Taluka today 12 hereditary divisions of the Taluka, each led by a chief (Sargana). The 12 chiefs meet as a panchayat to discuss matters of interest to the Thakurs themselves and to the taluka, and to arbitrate any dispute in the taluka.

Beneath the taluka and within Senapur itself, four or five Thakurs were usually recognised by all castes as informal headmen of the whole village. They tended to be selected from leading Thakur families. They sometimes sat together as a village panchayat. Whatever the reason, Chamars and low caste people were quiet and followed the political leadership of their Thakur landlords, according to Cohn, who, also studied the area.⁸ This was more or less the political organisation of the Taluka in the 19th century. In these cases one sees a single caste dominant in the region. Let us take some cases of village dominated by non-Rajput elements in the U.P. We have already referred to Karimpur studied by Wiser. Here we found dominant a group of Brahman landlords. They were both the spiritual and the temporal power. In the village of Kisan Garhi, in the Aligarh District of the U.P., powerful Brahman families were challenging the former Jat overlords. Considerable variations with respect to the dominant caste may exist in the U.P. Let us take the example of some Jat-dominated villages of the province. In western U.P. there are many settlements of Jats, in a number of them they are dominant. Such villages are Rani Khera and Kishan Garhi. In Kishan Garhi Marriot states that part of the power of the Jats derives from their external ties with the Jats of other villages. They are probably the only group in that village with such extensive ties outside. Possibly these ties link up also dominant Jat groups in different villages. The area was conquered by Jats three centuries ago, according to historical accounts, who replaced the local Rajputs. The revenue collecting headmen of 1951-52, appointees of the State Government, are descendants of the same Jat chieftains who seized control of the region some 300 years ago. They are the heads of the leading families of their localized lineages, the principal proprietors of the village lands, and, by the same token, quasi-officials of the state. Ancestors of the present Jat headmen, being in the de-facto control of hundreds of villages, had secured rights of revenue

⁸ *Village India*. p. 65.

collection under provincial officials of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.⁹ Marriot suggests that in these areas of North India government tends to grow from village to state. In Senapur land was divided among the heirs of each generation. In the Jat village of Rani Khera the same process took place.¹⁰ In a village next to Kisan Garhi land was held in 1952 by local proprietors under the superior proprietorship of a Raja, who is the living heir of the senior lineage of their own Jat clan. These villages have in common a kind of administrative link with the state government whereby parts of the local kinship organisation merged with parts of the state government. Recent changes in administration are changing much of this. But we can refer to the example of the ancestor of the present Rajput families of Gohana, a Chauhan, who was a general of the Moghul ruler at Delhi. From the accounts of these Jat villages dominant Jat lineages, it appears, have been dominant over hundreds of villages in the area and not just single ones. We thus find that different castes may dominate in different villages. Sometimes, and one would suspect frequently, the domination is over whole groups of villages by certain caste lineages.

Domination on the higher political levels may be exercised by other lineages, other castes, other communities. We may attempt a general estimate as to who are mainly dominant (taking into consideration all the various levels) in the U.P. as well as Northern India. If we take ownership of property, particularly land, in the rural areas, as an indication of secular dominance among the Hindus, the three castes most commonly dominating would then be the Rajputs, Brahmans and Banias; and in certain areas like Western U.P. the Jats (Refer previous tables). This is a statistical estimation, and it does not rule out local dominance by groups like Gujars, Ahirs and the rest. The probability, however, of depressed castes like Chamars dominating anywhere, however, can be said to be almost nil.

The foregoing discussions have helped to underline the fact that caste dominance or dominance exercised by non-Hindu groups like the Muslims is not exercised at the village level only. There are various levels of power, and an examination of these

⁹ Neyill, Aligarh, A Gazetteer, District Gazetteers of U.P. Alahabad Govt. Press, pp. 92-93.

¹⁰ O. Lewis. *Economic Weekly* 6. p. 424.

various levels is necessary to get a correct picture of the question of dominant castes and groups in Indian society, including dominance at local levels. Though we cannot enter into a very full discussion of all these levels of dominance, it would be useful to give a more rounded picture of this question of dominance in Indian society and discuss some aspects of it at the higher levels, as a part of the general characterization of dominant castes, that we are here attempting. Hence we shall try to depict broadly some features of the organization of dominance at the higher levels in the following pages.

Let us discuss this aspect with respect to two important areas of pre-British North India—the Indo-Gangetic plains and Rajasthan.

The Pathan and later Moghul rulers did not, it seems, alter basically the traditional land system according to Thorner.¹¹ The distinctive feature of Muslim land policy was the granting of 'iqtas', the distribution of villages and districts to the King's followers on condition that they furnished upon demand a stipulated number of troops. According to Moreland,¹² there were two types of iqta—one granted to mere "troopers" whose holdings were small, the other to great nobles charged with the administration of substantial tracts. Often the latter, termed 'mufti', were given to royal slaves who had risen in favour. The Mufti's post, Moreland said, was mainly administrative—to govern, and failure to do so entailed dismissal. He had to maintain a body of troops whose number and pay were set by the king, paid out of the revenues raised in his area. After deducting this and other sanctioned expenditure, the surplus had to be sent to the king's treasury. Such posts initially, and under a strong monarch, were necessarily temporary. The 'iqta' holders naturally tried to render their prerogatives hereditary and as independent of the Sultan of Delhi's will as possible. Thus in the middle of the 13th century history records an incident that many iqtadars refused to perform military service on the grounds that their grants were not conditional, but hereditary and unconditional.¹³

In various areas Hindu princes persisted, particularly in the outlying districts of the Delhi Empires, where they agreed to

¹¹ *Feudalism in History*, p. 146.

¹² *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, Cambridge, England, 1929, p. 218.

¹³ *Feudalism in History*, p. 145.

acknowledge the superiority of Delhi, supply troops and remit a part of the revenues they collected to the Emperor. In Moghul times it seems that the iqtadars had sometimes only the obligation of maintaining and supplying a certain number of troops. Those called 'zamindars' had to pay revenue also. At any rate the emperors and their provincial rulers insisted that these rights were not hereditary; that they had to be renewed at the beginning of each new reign; and that they had the right of dismissal. In practice succession was mostly from father to son (ibid, p. 146).

In addition to the 'iqtadars' and 'zamindars' there was the Moghul administration. We shall describe it in summary in order to show how it interwove royal or viceregal power with local power, and how it offered opportunities to different castes and groups to dominate at different levels.

The chief departments were :

1. The Exchequer and revenue under the High Diwan.
2. The Imperial Household under the High Steward.
3. The Military Pay and Accounts office under the chief Bakhshi.
4. Canon law both civil and criminal under the chief Quazi.
5. Religious endowments and charity under the Chief Sadar.
6. Censorship of public Morals under the Muhtasib.

In addition there were inferior departments like Artillery, Intelligence and Ports.

The provincial higher administration was a replica of the central higher administration. It seems to have been, however, concentrated in the capital and the towns. The 'subhadar', the provincial regulator or governor, was assisted by the faujdar, who was supposed to keep control of zemindars, assist revenue collectors, jagirdars and crown land revenue collectors, with armed force, if necessary. One of his functions was to prevent the manufacture of matchlocks by local blacksmiths. The provincial Diwan balanced the subhadar and kept an eye on him. He was appointed by the imperial Diwan and reported to him. The Kotwal acted as a police officer in the towns. The Central Government also kept a number of correspondents.¹⁴

¹⁴ Sarkar: *Mughal Administration*.

This was the organization of secular power broadly speaking on the higher levels, which, Marriot says, interwove with the secular power on the village and regional levels. During much of the Muslim period, of course, the highest officers, temporary or otherwise, were naturally Muslims, though Akbar appointed Hindu princes and administrative officers to head the central administration also. In the Gangeatic plains, particularly in the U.P. (table p. 83) a fairly large number of local landlords were Muslims. To the Hindus they and the Muslim administrators for all practical purposes were a caste. This seem to have been the general stratification of secular dominance at various levels in the Muslim periods in these regions.

RAJPUTANA

We can now examine an area in which secular dominance on the higher levels was exercised by Hindu elements. Let us take the example of medieval Rajputana. A. C. Lyall has an interesting note on the political institutions of the Rajput states of India which also throw an interesting light on the relation of kinship ties among the Rajputs to their political institutions.¹⁵

To Lyall, in the Western States of Rajputana, at least, "the conquering (Rajput) clans are still very much in the position which they took up on first entry upon the lands". He saw these as a political and military overlay upon the cultivating classes, composed mainly of castes and clans, whom the Rajputs had conquered, when they first took possession. They were a conquering 'tribal' settlement, the lords of the soil. In each Rajput state the governing authority rested in the hands of the hereditary chief of the dominant clan. The chief was "supposed to be the nearest legitimate descendant in direct male line from the founder of the state . . . and the heads of the branches from this main stock are the leading Rajput nobles, the pillars of his State".¹⁶ The chief of the dominant clan normally possessed the largest single portion, the rest by and large being divided up among the branch family and their offshoots. Where the clan organisation was strongest, there the territory ruled directly by the chief was likely to be the smallest, and vice versa. Hereditary heads of the branch septs may

¹⁵ Lyall, *Asiatic Studies* 1, p. 240 quoted by Thorner "*Feudalism in History*" pp. 141, 142.

¹⁶ *Asiatic Studies* 1, 228 quoted by Thorner, *ibid.* p. 141.

possess large tracts of land and act like chiefs in miniature. The lesser chiefs pay certain duties to the state chiefs; they must render military service against the foreigner or against rebels; their lands are rated in terms of the number of horsemen they are to furnish. At every succession the heirs of the lesser chiefs are bound to render homage to the state chief and pay a certain fine to his treasury.

The aristocracy of any one state was not a uniform group, stemming from different clans. In each state there was a ruling clan, to which the chief and the majority of the nobles belonged. The general picture, given by the Census of India, 1931, regarding the proportion of the dominant clan vis-a-vis the rest, is that in most states, the dominant clan formed the single largest clan in it, varying from 35-55% of the Rajput population. It must not, however, be thought that clan and state territory were coterminous. Members of most clans were dispersed, although unevenly, throughout Rajputana and outside.

The distribution of some of the ruling clans in Rajputana was as follows during the 1931 census :—

<i>Clan</i>	<i>States</i>
Chauhan	Bundi, Kotah, Sirohi
Gahlot	Mewar, Banswara, Dungurpur, Partabgarh, Shahpura
Jadon	Karauli, Jaisalmer
Jhala	Jhalawar
Kachwaha	Jaipur, Alwar.
Rathor	Marwar, Bikanir, Kisangarh.
	(ibid)

The percentage of Rajputs in the population of each Rajput state in 1931 was quite small:

Alwar 3%	Dungurpur 4%	Kishangarh 5%
	Jaipur 4%	Kotah 2%
Banswara 2%	Jaisalmer 26%	Marwar 9%
Bikanir 6%	Jhalawar 3%	Mewar 8%
		Partabgarh 4%
Bundi 2%	Karauli 4%	Shahpura 3%
		Sirohi 7%

It is clear that the dominant caste on the state level, at the time of the census of 1931, was the Rajput caste. There is not sufficient data available as to the distribution of dominant castes on the village level, but both modern and historical accounts, like Tod's testify to the domination by the Rajput Caste of the higher levels of political authority, upto the level of Chief or Prince in Rajputana. 'Rajputana', Lyall translated, is 'Land ruled by the Rajputs'. Here Rajput political rule at the top remained unbroken.

At the chief's court an advisory council was composed of his high-ranking nobles. In the nobles' estates similar councils were formed.¹⁸ In addition to the aristocratic monarchy the chief or Rajput state depended for assistance in government on a body of administrative officials. Their duties included the administration of crown lands and the co-ordination of the activities of the nobility. This set-up was imitated in miniature in the larger estates within the state. The civil administration at the state level was composed chiefly it seems of non-Rajputs, generally Brahmans, Kayasthas and Banias.¹⁹

Official position also tended to be hereditary, though their tenure was less secure than that of the landed nobility. The chief could remove them at any time. Payment was in salaries or by land grants.²⁰ Thus on this level secular dominance was also exercised by members of the Brahman, Kayasth and Bania castes. Grants of land to them made them at least petty landlords with its attendant power on the village level.

On the village level, apart from the labouring depressed castes and the artisans, the land tenure of the cultivators seem to have taken two forms:

- (1) Tenancy at will with no occupancy rights, removable at will, non heritable.²¹
- (2) Peasant proprietorship where security of tenure was perhaps greater than even that of the Rajput nobles.²²

Hence their saying quoted by Tod, "The government is the owner of the rent, but I am master of the land."²³ The contact between

¹⁸ Tod Vol. I p. 120.

¹⁹ cf. Rajputana Gazetteer, Vol. I, p. 62; Tod. Vol. I, pp. 380-381.

²⁰ Tod Vol. I. p. 115.

²¹ Rajputana Gazetteer, Vol. I, p. 64.

²² Tod. Vol. I. pp. 391-398.

²³ op. cit. p. 391.

the larger political system and the village was mainly that of revenue payment and collection by the nobles and the administration.

The peasant proprietor, it seems, was free to alienate his land. It was his private property. He could be transferred from one noble to another in the event of the larger estates changing hands, but was free to leave, if he wished.

The villagers lived in nucleated villages, which Tod described as tiny republics, giving allegiance and taxes to a noble, who neither legislated for them nor provided a police for their internal protection.²⁴ The revenue was collected through his administrative agents, the village headman and village accountant. The headman was a go-between the cultivator and the superior political power, hereditary, elected or nominated by the local chief and paid a share of the collected revenue, also by grants of tax-concessions and rent free land. The village accountant was paid in the same way. The caste of the headman, it seems, varied. The local landlord or jagirdar who received this revenue from the cultivators and artisans of the village, perhaps did so under a bigger jagirdar and so on. The rights to land revenue were continually being sub-divided. A high ranking Rajput noble might have had a larger number of Rajputs holding tracts for him having the same position with respect to him, as he occupied vis-a-vis his chief. The rights held by these minor holders could be further sub-divided among their kinsmen, followers and so on. Only the free holder paid no taxes and was not obliged to render military service.

Summing up, the broad picture that emerges with respect to medieval Rajputana regarding caste dominance seems to be as follows: On the village level the caste of the headman, it seems, varied. The caste of the minor jagirdars and landlords also varied being Rajput, Brahman, Kayasth or Bania generally. The composition of both the local and state administration also varied, being generally composed of Brahman, Kayasth and Banias. The higher nobility, the higher political level, was almost exclusively the preserve of the Rajputs and has remained so till the recent administrative reforms.

²⁴ Tod. Vol. I. p. 392.

MYSORE

We can now turn to an examination of caste dominance in certain areas in the south. Srinivas had described the dominant Peasant caste (the Okkaligas) of the Mysore village of Rampura.²⁵

Srinivas analyses dominance in an article in the 'American Anthropologist' into elements and states that any one caste at a particular moment may not be decisively dominant in all spheres—ritual, political, economical and so on. The more forms of dominance a caste enjoys, the easier is it to acquire new ones.

The Peasant caste of Rampura, however, today are by and large dominant in most spheres. An indication of this is that their particular caste council runs the village, arbitrates and interferes in matters pertaining to other caste councils. The official headman is a Peasant. The members of this caste own more land than the rest put together. Ritually, however, the Peasants are somewhat below the Brahmans and Lingayats. The Peasants are also numerically the single largest group which Srinivas argues is a factor consolidating their secular power. The former dominant caste of Brahmans in Rampura, however, do not seem to have been numerically the largest caste. We have discussed this question before.

The available evidence show that in the early years of this century the Brahmans were the secular power in this village. Since then they have lost land and power.

The Peasant Caste here is the spearhead of anti-Brahman agitation. It also resists most stubbornly any attempt by the Untouchables to change their status. In this respect its actions are similar to other peasant castes both in North and South India e.g. the Jats.²⁶

The reaction of the clean castes including the peasant castes in the Orissan village of Bisipara in preventing the Untouchables entering the village temple is a similar example.²⁷

Namhalli another Mysore village, studied by Beals, reveals a similar state of affairs. Here a group of peasant castes have ousted the once dominant priestly Jangama not only from economic power

²⁵ *Village India*, p. 3 seq. American Anthropologist: The Dominion Caste in Rampura, vol. 61, No. 1, Feb. 1959. pp. 1 seq.

²⁶ Ibbeston, Punjab Census, 1881, p. 184.

²⁷ Bailey, *Caste and Economic Frontier*, p. 221, seq.

but also politically. The untouchable Madigas are of course kept in their places.²⁸

In Mysore one then sees examples of various clean castes—Brahmans, Lingayats, Jangamas, Peasants exercising secular dominance on the village and local level. On the higher political level even Muslims have ruled in Mysore including the Muslim Chief Minister of the former Maharaja of Mysore—Sir Mirza Ismail.

MALABAR

According to K. Gough Aberle²⁹ and Miller³⁰ in Malabar the general types of secular dominance seems to have been the following types: It will be convenient to discuss it in terms of 'lord' and 'vassal' though there were differences with medieval Europe. There were four basic types:—

1. The lord was a village landlord, a Nambudri Brahman, an aristocratic Samantan, Nayar or Kshatriya or the deity of a Brahmanical temple. The vassal was a non-cultivating military tenant from a family of one of a range of the Nayar commoner castes. Under him were the cultivating castes.
2. The lord was either a village landlord or a non-cultivating military tenant; the vassal a cultivating tenant generally of the Tiyyan or Iruva castes.
3. The lords were collectively the village landlord and the non-cultivating military tenants of the village. The vassal belonged to the castes of village servants—Smiths, Astrologers, Bow-makers, Washermen, Barbers and so on—who came under the direct control of an assembly of non-cultivating tenants, who had the village landlord as their overlord and court of appeal.
4. The lord was a village landlord, a non-cultivating tenant or, as in some trading settlements, a merchant. The vassal was a serf or slave, usually of the Cheruma or Puleya castes, who often cultivated rice, made salt and performed generally menial tasks. The serfs prior to the 18th century seem to have been tied to the soil.

²⁸ *Village India*, pp. 78 seq.

²⁹ *Man in India*, June 1959, p. 115 seq.

³⁰ *India's Villages*, pp. 40 seq.

The local community was organised in three major ways. There was, first, the ordinary villages or 'desams', directly or indirectly under the authority of the king. Such villages might have as the village landlords a Village Headman belonging to a Nayar aristocratic caste, or a District Chief of a higher Nayar aristocratic caste, of a Samantan caste or of the royal Kshatriya lineage. We have, then, here a situation in which the vassal was a Nayar Village Headman, the lord a Nayar District Chief or the king himself. Or we have as vassal a Nayar or Samantan District chief, and the lord is the king. Another type of local community was that of merchants at ports or inland trading settlements. The king usually appointed a hereditary Merchant Headman to govern such a settlement.³¹ The merchants had their own serfs and service castes in the same hereditary pattern of relationship, as existed between the landlord and these castes in the country in general. The Merchant Headman was vassal to the king.

There was a third type of local community which consisted of villages owned by Nambudri Brahman families and temple estates managed by committees of Brahmans. The Brahmans governed their own communities and were above the jurisdiction of the royal courts.³²

In a sense the king was himself subject to Brahmanical jurisdiction there, though he had the right of partial command over the Nayar soldiers resident here. In turn the Brahman assembly could fine a 'vassal' king, if he violated their economic or judicial rights. Brahman legal specialists were also consulted in the administration of justice by courts and caste assemblies. And finally, the head of the Brahman caste installed the kings of Central Kerala. This is a very good example of the duality in the relations between the dominant castes, including the king and the Brahmans, a relationship both of co-operation and of conflict, which we shall discuss in the next chapter.

Thus secular dominance was exercised generally by Nayars, Brahmans and Merchants locally. On the higher levels Samantans, Kshatriyas and Brahmans as well as the more aristocratic Nayars exercised it.

³¹ K. V. Krishna Ayyer, *"The Zamorins of Calicut"*, The Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut 1938, pp. 103, 104.

³² K. V. Krishna Ayyer, *op. cit.* pp. 47-49.

ANDHRA

In Andhra the term for a village watchman is 'Kapu.'³³

This is the name of a large Peasant caste of the Telugu country. The usual title given to the Kapus is 'Reddi' and this is also the title of the village munsiff (op. cit. p. 230) and it also means 'king' (op. cit. p. 223). The connotation of such titles like Reddi which is often used as another name for the Peasant caste indicates the position of power, which this caste often holds in this area. Dube describes the Reddis as a dominant caste in his 'Indian village.' He notes the operation of caste organization on an extra village basis.³⁴

He found that 68% of 380 marriages were confined to a group of villages within a radius of 35 miles from Shamirpet village; 30% within 60 miles of the villages and only 2% in more distant parts. These reflect the areas of active social relationships and often ties which local dominant castes have outside the village. The fact that the name of the Kapu caste is linked with titles of watchmen, munsiff or king implies the wide extent of local secular dominance achieved by this peasant caste. In Shamirpet there is also a substantial landowning Brahman family. Shamirpet was a part of the former Hyderabad state, whose higher nobility were generally Muslims, and, which was ruled by the Muslim Nizam. With respect to areas like Shamirpet in Andhra the facts regarding different levels of secular dominance is more or less the same as elsewhere.

TANJORE (MADRAS)

The Tanjore district in Madras state was studied by Gough. She found that the Brahmans of Tanjore, numbering about 200,000, owned the land and administrative power in about 900 villages out of a total of 2611, that is in about 30% of the villages of that area. Clean non-Brahman castes dominated the rest, owning the land and administering the village. Among them were Tamil Vellalans or Peasant Caste; Tamil Kellans, former bandits and ex-soldiers; several ex-soldier Telugu castes who belonged to the conquering Nayak armies of Vijayanagar of the 14th century; several castes of Marathas, descendants of the armies and rulers, who took over Tanjore from the Nayaks in 1675. The Brahman

³³ Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. 3, pp. 22 seq.

³⁴ Dube, op. cit. p. 53 seq.

settlement seems to have been mainly in two periods, the earlier one taking place in the early years of the Christian era. The Maratha rulers settled another number of Brahman landlords. The Brahmans of Kumbapettai village possessed administrative rights over the other castes in the village. The considerable extent of local Brahman power can be seen from the 900 villages which they dominate. At the higher level history records frequent changes of power—Nayaks, Marathas and so on.

COORG

We may finally examine Coorg. The political organization of Coorg consisted of the village and the 'nad' or group of villages of which there were 35. These were, in turn, grouped into 12 'kombus' which means 'branch.' The 12 kombus formed the kingdom of Coorg ruled by the non-Coorg Lingayat Rajas. The number of villages in a 'nad' varied, 11 in one, 5 in another, 10 in a third and so on.

Every village had a hereditary headman presiding over a council of elders. Every 'nad' had also headmen ranging from, say, one to seven. It had also an assembly consisting of representatives from various 'okkas' or households. Representation depended on the secular power, specifically land, which the okka possessed.

Above the 'nad' headmen were the 'sime' or headman, eight in all, who had precedence over 'nad' headmen. Srinivas is of the opinion that formerly the biggest territorial group had been a group of 2 or 3 nads under a chief, who called himself Nayaka. These chiefs continuously fought among themselves, making it easier for the Lingayat Rajas to conquer Coorg.

On the village level Srinivas mentions two important castes other than the Coorg—the peasant Okkaligas and the Goudas. In addition there are the Brahmans, the Lingayats and the trading Komtis. Coorgs themselves are both landlords and cultivators as well as being a military group. On the village level the peasant castes may also have been dominant, but the general impression that Srinivas gives is that locally, as well as on the higher levels, Coorgs dominated in Coorg, though for a long time the kings were Lingayats.³⁵

³⁵ Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorg*, pp. 57-58.

In the light of this examination we can refer to the earlier discussion on numerical size and the possession of wealth. We have seen that in a district there may be a number of dominant castes, on the other hand a single caste may dominate over a number of districts. Using the figures for property holding given by the Government of India's 'Rural Manpower Survey', (cf. Ch. 6) as an index of similar dominance, local and otherwise, the main property-holding — specifically land-holding — castes in Northern India are the Rajput, Brahman, Baniyas, in some areas the Jats. In Malabar they are the Nayars and the Brahmans, in Coorg the Coorg, in Central India the Brahmans, the Marathas and Rajputs mainly. Popular opinion has been, and is that, by and large, these groups have been dominant on the local and higher levels. They have been popularly recognized as the higher castes in their respective regions. In North India the Brahmans, Rajputs or Kshatriyas and Baniyas are known as the twice-born. Statistics tends to confirm these popular notions. Nevertheless, if we examine their population on a district basis, they are, as we have seen, numerically not the largest caste in the district.

In Rajputana the Rajputs formed a small proportion of both the population of Rajputana and of the smaller states and districts. Nevertheless, if we discuss caste dominance on the regional and state level, numerical size has no direct relation with the exercise of secular power. This, we have seen, was also the case with the Muslim rulers of the Indo-Gangeatic plain. This is undoubtedly the case in every other region, that we have examined. Caste being a basic form of social organization in Hindu India, the question of caste dominance has to be examined on this plane also. On the village level the dominant caste may or may not be the largest single caste. My own estimate is that apart from some areas in South India, it is generally not. On the district, regional and state level neither the dominant caste nor group of such castes are numerically the single largest caste.

We have examined briefly the pattern of secular dominance in a number of areas in India at various levels, particularly prior to the coming of the present administration and the changes it is introducing. From this examination a number of facts seem to emerge :

1. On the local and village level different castes may dominate from period to period. In the past their military power was essential for this domination.
2. On the higher political levels other groups may dominate from time to time.
3. Thus, in the final analysis, domination over a locality or a village is exercised, often, by a number of divergent groups or castes via the local and higher nobility, the local and state administration and so on.
4. The domination by groups on the higher political level has different forms, depending on whether it has been a case of foreign conquest and how recent it is. In the case of the Maratha occupation of Dewar Senior, Marathas replaced the higher nobility and central administration generally, but left the local Rajput landlords alone. In the case of the Muslims the tendency was for the king to rule as much as possible through a bureaucracy under his own control and to appoint temporary governors, jagirdars etc. A tighter bureaucratic and military organization was rendered necessary for them in the initial phases by reason of their relatively small numbers in a foreign land of a foreign faith. But even they generally preferred to come to terms with local rulers, with local dominant groups, as the three case studies in the U.P. seem to suggest. To the extent, however, top groups could develop local roots, to that extent they were more strongly based. The proof of the pudding seems to have been in the eating—Hindu feudal power has lasted till now, whilst the powerful states of the Pathans and the Moghuls have disappeared.

Bearing these characteristics in mind and remembering the considerable variations in the forms of secular dominance, including land tenures, forms of administration, that exist in India, let us analyse further some of the characteristics of the dominant castes, irrespective of their levels of secular power. We shall take four examples, which we shall study in their broad aspects, leaving aside local variations, for the purpose of elucidating some other features of typical dominant caste groups in India. These analyses do not prescribe the extent of dominance. They are four isolates for the sake of clarifying certain features regarding caste dominance.

THE DOMINANT CASTE (II)

LET US EXAMINE a little more closely the relation between caste dominance and ritual practice. For this purpose let us examine four dominant castes—The Rajputs in Northern India, the Marathas in Central and Western India, the Coorgs in Mysore and the Nayars of Malabar. In discussing them, we are discussing some of the attributes of primarily local dominant castes, and are not implying either that all their caste members are equally dominant locally, nor that these castes are dominant everywhere and at all levels.

THE RAJPUTS

The Rajput caste can be said to have been, and to quite an extent still is, a dominant caste in a large number of localities in Bihar, the U.P., the Punjab, Rajasthan, parts of Gujarat, Central India and the Central Provinces. Traditionally according to Tod the Rajputs were divided into 36 great clans, such as the Ikshwaka, Indu, Gahlot, Yadu, Tomara, Rathor, Kachwaha, Chauhan, Solanki, Parihar, Jit, Hun and so on. Several of the above clans are extinct or nearly so. On the other hand according to Russell some important contemporary clans like Gautama, Dikhit and Bisen as well as historically important ones like the Chandel and the Haihaya were not included in Tod's list. All Rajput clans (those which are recognised by Rajputs as such) are grouped into one of three 'Vamsas'—those descended from the sun, those from the moon, those from the fire. Thus the Ikshwaka, the Sesodia, the Kachwaha, Bais and Bedgujar are of solar descent. The Tomara, Jit and Yadavs of lunar descent. The Panwar, Chauhan, Solanki and Parihar are descended from the fire. The social function of the Vamsas seems to be to provide a link with the historical and legendary past, with the great Kshatriyas of the past (e.g. Ram Chandra), thus to establish prestige and to link the Rajput caste with religion. Any other functions they may perform is not very clear, as vamsas did not serve as a uniting agent in various political alignments in the

past. The functions of the unit under the vamsa—the clan—is however clear. It is the largest group of agnates tracing their descent to a common ancestor. In Rajputana it is exogamous and any sexual relations within it are considered incestuous. Most clans belong to one of the three vamsas, though not all claims are recognised. Though in theory the clan is exogamous, lower class Rajputs break this rule. Outside Rajputana, for instance in Bihar, it is the Rajput lineage that is becoming more the exogamous unit as is the case with many other local castes.¹ Here a number of differences in marriage practice occur between Rajput custom and Brahmanical rules. There does not seem to be in Bihar (according to Risley) any rule of prohibited degrees of relationship within which one may not marry, such as exist among many other castes. In Rajputana one may also freely marry into the mother's clan, barring the mother's sisters.² Among certain high ranking Rajputs a preferred marriage is matrilinear cross cousin marriage.³

This is of course directly contrary to the Brahmanical rules of marriage. The clans subdivide into 'sakhas' or lineages, and then into further subdivided lineages. These are the narrower kin groups, and in marriage the rule of hypergamy prevails, by which a man must marry his daughter to a man of at least equal status to his own. Widow remarriage and divorce are not allowed.

The traditional occupations of Rajputs were those of warriors and landholders. They assumed titles like Bhupal (Protector of the Earth), Bhupati (lord of the earth), Bahuja (Born from the arms of God).⁴ There was a general rule that Rajputs are landlords and warriors and that they must not touch the plough. This has caused severe strain on the poorer Rajputs today. Barnes in the 'Kangra Settlement Report' states "A Mian or well-known Rajput, to preserve his name and honour unsullied, must scrupulously observe four fundamental maxims; first, he must never drive the plough; second, he must never give his daughter in marriage to an inferior, nor marry himself much below his rank; thirdly, he must never accept money in exchange for the betrothal of his daughter; and lastly, his female household must observe strict seclusion. The

¹ Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 186.

² Rajputana Gazetteer, Vol. I, p. 69.

³ Karve, *op. cit.* pp. 142-144.

⁴ Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 191.

prejudice against the plough is perhaps the most inveterate of all; that step can never be recalled; the offender at once loses the privileged salutation; he is reduced to the second grade of Rajputs; no man will marry his daughter and he must go a step lower in the social scale to get a wife for himself. In every occupation of life he is made to feel his degraded position However the prospect of starvation has already driven many to take the plough and the number of offenders daily increases.”⁵

In the Central Provinces, however, the objection to ploughing by the time of the Census of 1911 seems to have been largely overcome, as nine-tenths of the whole caste were shown to be engaged in pasture and agriculture and one-tenth as landholders. Three-fifths were actual cultivators and one-fifth labourers and woodcutters.⁶ In Bihar, according to Risley, the Rajputs had also taken to ploughing and animal husbandry.⁷ In the village of Ramkheri studied by Mayer⁸ the Rajputs were engaged in tilling the land. In Madhopur village in the U.P. studied by Cohn, the Rajputs, however, were non-cultivating landlords. In the same way the Rajputs were similar landlords in Senapur village in the U.P. studied by Opler and Singh and “disdained to touch the plough.”⁹

In their regard for manual work and their attitude to divorce etc. Rajputs and Brahmans are very much alike. It is with respect to what they eat and drink that Rajputs differ considerably both from the general Brahminical rules and the practices of local Brahmans. The Brahmans of North India (we are not including Kashmir and Bengal in this discussion) are by and large vegetarians and abjure drink. On the other hand, Rajputs in a large number of areas eat flesh and also drink alcohol. According to Russell in the Central Provinces the Rajputs ate the flesh of clean animals but not pigs or fowls. The Bundela Rajputs, however, eat the flesh of wild pig. And Russell thinks that this custom was probably universal.¹⁰

In the U.P. village of Senapur according to Opler and Singh some Thakurs or Rajputs ate wild pig.¹¹ In Bihar according to Risley Rajputs eat the flesh of the goat, the deer and the hare,

⁵ Ibbetson's Punjab Census Report, 1881, p. 456.

⁶ Russell, op. cit. pp. 432, 433.

⁷ Risley, op. cit. p. 191.

⁸ Mayer S.W., *Journal of Anthropology*, 1956, Vol. 12, pp. 130, 131.

⁹ Coon, *Reader in General Anthropology*, p. 470.

¹⁰ Russell, Vol. 4, op. cit. p. 423.

pigeon, quail and ortolan Fish is lawful food.¹² In the Central Indian village of Ramkheri Rajputs are great flesh eaters.¹³ In the Rajasthan township of Deoli the Rajputs are great flesh eaters (Carstairs).

In the Kangra area according to Barnes quoted by Ibbetson part of the Rajput diet consisted of certain varieties of game birds and wild pig.

Their attitude to alcoholic drink is also often non-Brahmanical. Carstairs remarks that in Deoli in Rajasthan Rajputs associated heroism in battle and their berserk fury when crossed to the virtue of taking meat and wine.

Carstairs' Rajput informant Rajindar Singh quoted Rajput verses to him about the importance of meat and wine. "Lacking meat, all food is grass; lacking wine, thou hadst no happiness."¹⁴ Crooke remarks that in the British administered districts of Northern India 'dissipation and excessive use of drugs or spirits are common among them.'¹⁵

In the Central Provinces according to Russell,¹⁶ the Rajputs abstain from alcoholic liquor, though the Bundela Rajputs drink it. In classical times, he adds, there is no doubt that they drank freely.

THE MARATHAS

Let us discuss another caste which is dominant over a large area of the present Bombay and Madhya Pradesh states. The Marathas came into prominence with the rise of Shivaji Bhonsle (1627-80) whose successful rebellion against the Bijapur Kingdom founded the Maratha Empire. Shivaji at his coronation was solemnly invested with the sacred thread as a Kshatriya. Marathas today claim twice born status and to follow many of the Kshatriya practices to this day. It is clear that the fighting classes and large landowners gained considerably, says Enthoven,¹⁷ in social precedence owing to the rise of the Maratha confederacy with its five centres at Poona, Nagpur, Indore, Gwalior and Baroda. This

¹² Op. cit. p. 470.

¹³ Risley, op. cit. p. 191.

¹⁴ Mayer, op. cit. p. 123.

¹⁵ Op. cit. p. 201.

¹⁶ Crooke, *Natives of Northern India*, p. 91.

¹⁷ Op. cit. p. 423.

¹⁸ Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, Vol. III, pp. 7-41.

area can be styled Maratha-dominated. The word Maratha covers three classes that were probably one in origin but are now distinct.

(1) Marathas Proper, the chiefs, landowners, military elements of the Deccan and Konkan, who claim Kshatriya rank. They practise widow remarriage, claim social superiority to the cultivating Marathas, but will in places take girls from them in marriage.

(2) Maratha Kunbis or cultivators.

(3) Maratha occupational castes e.g.

- | | | |
|----------------|----------|----------|
| 1. Bhandari | 5. Lohar | 9. Takar |
| 2. Chitrakathi | 6. Mali | 10. Taru |
| 3. Gavandi | 7. Nhavi | 11. Tali |
| 4. Kumbhar | 8. Parit | |

These castes have (according to Enthoven) certain features in common with the first two groups. The common belief in Maharashtra including among Marathas, regarding the origin of the Marathas is that, there is little or no difference, as far as caste is concerned, between Marathas and Kunbis. The line of demarcation between the two communities is not a hard and fast one as hypergamous marriages between well-to-do Kunbi families and the lower sections of the Marathas are not infrequent, as for instance in the Bombay area.¹⁸ Though Kunbis prefer the name Maratha to Kunbi they have no pretensions to Kshatriya status as do the Maratha proper. Russell is also of the opinion that the Marathas and the peasant Kunbis were one caste at one time.¹⁹

The Marathas proper, however, claim that they belong to the 4 great Kshatriya vamshas or lines—the Surya vamsha (solar dynasty) the Soma vamsha (lunar dynasty), Brahma vamsha and Shesha vamsha and that they have 96 mythological Kshatriya families or kuls, some of which, they say, bear the same names as such Rajput kuls as Chauhan, Solanki, Panwar and so on. Enthoven says their number is more than 96 (ibid). Russell thinks that the element of truth in this is that some Rajput clans and families have mixed with the Kunbis.²⁰ For instance, Tod states that Shivaji was the 13th descent from a Rajput prince

¹⁸ Russell, *op. cit.* Vol. 4, p. 201.

¹⁹ Russell, *op. cit.* Vol. 4, p. 199.

²⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 200.

Sujunsi, who was expelled from Mewar in a succession dispute about A.D. 1300. Risley is of the opinion that the Marathas are of Indo-Scythian origin as are supposed to be some of the Jats.²¹

The Sholapur Gazetteer, quoted by Russell,²² states that at Sholapur Marathas and the Kunbis eat together. Russell, quoting the Satara Gazetteer says that some Maratha families may have a larger strain of northern or Rajput blood than the Kunbis, but this is not always the case. The distinction between Kunbis and Marathas is almost entirely social, the Marathas as a rule being better off, and "preferring even service as a constable or a messenger to husbandry" (p. 64). The Kunbis in Satara are also divided into 96 exogamous groups. Besides hypergamous marriages with Marathas, Kunbis in the Bombay area by paying sufficiently can get their sons married to Maratha girls and even be adopted into the Maratha caste.²³ Hence Enthoven is of the opinion that when a caste or a portion of a caste rises in the social scale on account of worldly prosperity, it adopts a mythological pedigree like the 4 vamshas, from which the Marathas claim descent, and imitates the higher caste by prohibiting widow marriage, wearing the sacred thread and adopting the purdah system. The number of Maratha clans as a matter of fact again, it seems, greatly exceed 96 (in spite of Maratha claims to the contrary),²⁴ and there are differences of opinions regarding their names.²⁵ The Kunbis for instance have widow remarriage, but the Marathas do not.

To take another instance, Vincent Smith is of the opinion that many of the present day Rajputs and Jats also sprang from similar stock (cf. above), the Rajputs becoming a higher caste.

Such also is Ibbetson's opinion: "Whether Jats and Rajputs were or were not originally distinct, and whatever aboriginal elements may have been affiliated to their society, I think that the two now form a common stock, the distinction between Jat and Rajput being social rather than ethnic. I believe that those families of that common stock whom the tide of fortune has raised to

²¹ Imperial Gazetteer, Tod. Rajasthan 1, p. 269.

²² Op. cit. p. 200.

²³ Bombay Census Report, 1907, op. cit. p. 9.

²⁴ Enthoven, op. cit. pp. 23-25.

²⁵ Russell, op. cit. p. 274; Enthoven, op. cit. p. 9.

political importance have become Rajputs almost by mere virtue of their rise; and that their descendants having retained the title and its privileges on the condition, strictly enforced, of observing the rules by which the higher are distinguished from the lower castes in the Hindu scale of precedence; of preserving their purity of blood by refusing to marry with families of inferior social rank, of rigidly abstaining from widow remarriage, and of refraining from degrading occupations.”²⁶

It is interesting to speculate whether a similar process had taken place between the military Nayars and the servant Nayars. It would seem, then, that in the case of the Marathas and the Rajputs the attainment of political and economic power has given them their higher status vis-a-vis their former caste brethren. We have seen this to be the case in the individual village studies. According to Andrejeweski, in the final analysis it is military might which enables the attainment of political and economical power.²⁷ The fact that all these three dominant castes are military castes gives support to his view that economic power is derivative from military power.

Russell quoting Colonel Tone says that the Marathas ate flesh food except beef.²⁸ Enthoven states that the staple food of the Marathas includes flesh and fish. “The well-to-do eat mutton or fowls daily . . . Marathas seldom use liquor, though no caste rule forbids either liquor or narcotics. They do not eat beef or pork.”²⁹ Their divergence from Brahmanical food rules is evident. Like the Rajputs, Coorgs and Nayars, the Marathas have a wide range of flesh diet and do not necessarily abstain from liquor.

With respect to the rules of marriage — marriage is forbidden within one's own clan. A sister's son may be married to a brother's daughter but not vice versa generally.³⁰ Karve says that marriage with the mother's brother's daughter is a preferred type of marriage, but the other type of cross cousin marriage is taboo.³¹ It is customary for the father of the bride to receive bride price, money for his daughter in marriage.³²

²⁶ Ibbetson's Report on the Punjab Census, p. 220.

²⁷ Andrejeweski, *The Military Organisation of Society*, p. 25.

²⁸ Russell, op. cit. p. 204.

²⁹ Op. cit. p. 41.

³⁰ Russell, op. cit. p. 203; Karve, *Kinship Organisation in India*, p. 156.

³¹ Op. cit. pp. 158, 159.

³² Karve, op. cit. p. 160.

It will be seen that these rules are not according to the Brahmanical principles practised in North India, nor according to those which have been laid down in the written sacred literature generally. The Brahmans of Maharashtra, however, except the Chitpavans, actually prefer matrilateral cross-cousin marriage as long as it is outside the gotra and the pravara.

Thus the Marathas like the Rajputs do not follow Brahmanical rules of diet, but their rules of marriage, though they differ from those laid down by North Indian Brahmans, have similarities with the rules followed by Maharashtrian Brahmans generally, (save the Chitpavans), in that both groups prefer a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, but forbid a patrilateral cross-cousin as a mate.³³

THE COORG

Coorg is a mountainous province in South India, now in Mysore state. The dominant caste in this area has given its name to the territory. Coorgs consider themselves to be Kshatriyas, in the division of rulers and soldiers, next in rank only to the Brahmans. They do not, however, perform certain classically Kshatriya rites. They constituted the aristocracy under the Lingayat Rajas, holding important positions in the administration and very nearly monopolising the army. Apart from the Brahmans, the Telugu speaking trading Komti caste and the Lingayats, all other castes adopted to a greater or to a lesser extent the Coorg customs and practices which I detail below. High castes, like the peasant Kannada speaking Okkaligas and Tulu speaking Gaudas, both tried to pass off for Coorgs in North Coorg.

The main body of Coorgs do not contain any sub-divisions today, but formerly, during the time of the Rajas, in pre-British times they were divided into 2 groups called 'Sanna' Coorgs and 'Malla Coorgs', the latter representing the main body of Coorgs. Another section of Coorgs settled in north Coorg, who had been influenced by local Tulu Gauda and Kannada Okkaliga customs, were labelled by the other Coorgs as 'boddu Coorgs' or 'stupid Coorgs'. Marriages between them were not very frequent. Apart from these Coorgs, there is a small body of Coorg, who are highly Brahmanised in their customs and ritual, called Amma Coorgs,

³³ Karve, *op. cit.* p. 161.

who claim today Brahman status.³⁴ We shall discuss them also later.

Not very typical of the caste system is the comparative ease with which non-Coorgs belonging to fairly high castes are admitted into the Coorg fold. Moegling wrote in 1855 strangers are received among them and naturalised without difficulty.³⁵

In Coorg at present there are more than 40 main castes, and a Coorg comes into intimate contact with Tulu or Malabar Brahmans; Kaniyas or astrologers and magicians, who reveal the auspicious moment for important tasks; and the Bannas who perform the task of ancestor propitiation. These he meets in ritual context. Among others that he meets are the blacksmiths, carpenters and goldsmiths, washermen and barbers. After meeting the latter, the Coorg bathes. He meets the Mada who makes artefacts of bamboo, and of course the untouchable Poleyas, who act as his servants.

Let us now proceed to outline some other features of the Coorgs, in accordance with my purpose, to bring out some salient similarities and dissimilarities, that they have with the dominant castes of other regions, as well as with the scriptural Brahmanical traditions.

The nuclear unit of Coorg society is the 'okka' or patrilineal joint family. Only the male members have any rights in the ancestral estate. No woman may be the head of an 'okka'. Women born in the 'okka' leave it on marriage and those women who come into the 'okka' by marriage have extremely limited rights in it. Only sons can continue the 'okka'.

The men either cultivate or supervise the cultivation of land by low-caste labourers. Military service in the past and present has always had an attraction for Coorg men.

In social life there is a general segregation of the sexes. Respect has to be formally shown to elders.

All members of an okka are descended from a common ancestor. The spirits of the dead ancestors are regarded with great reverence and propitiated periodically. Every okka has an ancestral house built on the ancestral estate with an ancestor shrine.

³⁴ Srinivas, *op. cit.* pp. 34, 35.

³⁵ Coorg Memoirs, p. 55, quoted by Srinivas, p. 37.

Formerly most of the members of the okka lived in the ancestral house. According to Lewis Rice,¹⁶ quoted by Srinivas (op. cit. p. 50) in the seventies of the last century the Coorg okka frequently consisted of twenty, thirty, even fifty members under one roof. The eldest male of the seniormost agnatic branch is the manager of the okka, but Coorg law gives the right to replace an incompetent manager.

The marriage restrictions among the Coorg are these : first of all marital relations are forbidden between members of the same 'okka'. A man may not marry the daughter of his father's brother, of his father's first, second and third cousin whether they live in the same okka or not. A man is also prohibited from marrying the daughters of his mother's sisters. The Coorgs like other speakers of the Dravidian languages have a classificatory kinship terminology. Cross-cousin marriage with mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter is preferred and common.

Both divorce by men and widow remarriage is allowed, which differentiates them from the Rajputs.

Until the beginning of the last century the immoveable property of an okka was regarded as impartible and property descended from one generation to another without being split up in the process. The British administration, however, encouraged the partition of the ancestral property, and also enabled the purchase of landed property to be made by individuals, and held as individual property. The ancient custom of the Coorgs recognized individual property only to a limited extent. The encouragement at present to ideas of partition and individual acquisition, the dispersal of the Coorgs from their ancestral homes are adversely affecting the solidarity of the okka. The elementary family, which was a weak entity in the past, is now emerging more strongly. A married woman had certain rights in her natal okka as well as in her husband's okka.

The village, Srinivas says, represents a different type of solidarity from caste, stressing the solidarity between different castes. In a Coorg village houses are scattered over a wide area and the nearest Coorg or high-caste neighbour may be several hundred yards away.

¹⁶ Mysore and Coorg, Bangalore, 1878, Vol. iii, p. 329.

perhaps on the other side of the hill or valley. Feuds between 'okkas', raids by hostile villages and nads were frequent in the past. Hence friendship with neighbouring okkas was valued. Every village had a council of elders presided over by a headman. The headmanship was held by heredity by a certain okka from which the headman was chosen. Next to the village is the nad which is a group of villages. Each 'nad' has a number of headmen. Two or three nads sometimes united for defence or hunting.

Srinivas says that the Coorgs are the highest caste next to the Brahmans. Nevertheless, in spite of recent efforts at Sanskritisation, the list of their differences with the practices of orthodox Brahmanism is considerable. To start with they have a flesh diet which includes pig and fowl. They bury and do not cremate their dead. They have divorce and allow widow remarriage. These practices also mark them out as separate from the northern Rajputs. There are also, Srinivas says, considerable differences in ritual. The offer of meat and liquor to ancestors as well as the elaborate ancestor-propitiation are non-Brahmanical and non-Sanskritic modes of propitiation involving the offer of non-vegetarian food and liquor. Also no Brahman priests are present and no Sanskrit Mantras are chanted. We shall see similar cases with respect to blood sacrifice among the Malabar Military Nayars later. The fact is that both the Northern Rajputs and the Coorgs violate Brahmanical principles and rules of purity and pollution on a number of points. This disproves Stevenson's contention that obedience to these rules secures the high status of a caste. Within limits (such as avoiding beef, eating which would scandalise the entire Hindu community), if the caste possesses sufficient secular power it can be a law unto itself. It can also set up a model to other castes, as the Coorg are to the Okkaligas and the Gaudas,³⁸ and act as an alternative to the Brahman model.

THE NAYARS

Let us study some aspects of another dominant caste in another region of India—the Nayars of Malabar for the purposes of comparison. Nayar social organisation is complex and certain regional

³⁷ Srinivas, *op. cit.* p. 165.

³⁸ Srinivas, *op. cit.* p. 32.

variations exist as between North and South Malabar. There is a growing body of literature on the Nayers. I shall not discuss it in detail as a full description would be lengthy and not relevant to the purpose in hand. I shall, however, endeavour to show some features of South Malabar Nayar life, which are similar or dissimilar to the practices of other dominant castes and to some of the rules of Brahmanical theory.

The Nayers are a dominant and military caste of Malabar. In Malayali society at the top are the Brahmans, below them the 'royal' caste, and below the royal caste come the various Nayar sub-castes.

In many areas Nambudri Brahmans are large landlords. The relation of the royal Malayali caste to the Nambudri Brahmans have a unique feature. Only the eldest Nambudri son could marry a Nambudri woman. The other sons could have relations with royal women. Men of the royal group could in turn have relations with women of the higher Nayar sub-castes. This relationship between the Nambudri Brahmans and the royal caste is to be seen in Malabar alone.

Prior to the arrival of the British administration the Nayers had been engaged in a series of wars.³⁹

According to Gough this had an impact on their peculiar kinship organisation which we shall see later.

The Nayers were divided into a number of endogamous sub-castes each with specialised functions in the Government of the country. Some of these functions were to operate as chiefs of districts; to be heads of villages; to be retainers to royal lineages and to Nambudri Brahmans and palanquin bearers of the royal lineage.

The system of the military Nayers in South Malabar was composed of a series of matrilineal maximal lineages called 'taravads'. Under these maximal lineages were property holding groups called 'taveri'. Sometimes the word 'taravad' was also used to denote these property holding groups which could be a minimal lineage, a joint family. The management of the property was in the hands of a male manager called the Karvaran. With respect to the

³⁹ Gough *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, No. 1, 1952.

maximal lineage these are some of the characteristics : recruitment to it is by matrilineal descent. It is an exogamous unit. It has got its own cult and organises a certain ritual, which we shall see later, called the 'tali' rite. With respect to the joint family it is exogamous, holding property jointly, consuming its products jointly. It conducts common ancestor worship. Its head, the manager of the property, the Karvaran represents the family in the military council of the Nayars.

Every 12 years each maximal lineage hold the 'tali' ceremony. This is to announce to the community the girls of marriageable age. This ceremony has elements of initiation as well as a kind of symbolic marriage. Radcliffe-Brown's explanation of this marriage and divorce is that it legitimises all future children born to the woman and gives her lineage the right to them.⁴⁰

The woman can now contract unions which are called 'sam-bandham'—a control perhaps being exercised by the elder male of her family. The dissolution of these unions is also a simple matter. The paternity of the children born of such unions was uncertain because in South Malabar several husbands were allowed and these only visited, but did not reside with their wife. But paternity was also irrelevant, for the children belong to and are brought up by the mother's family.

The land held by the joint family is worked by the tenants of the Tiyyan caste or by serfs.

In Malabar the villages are dispersed villages called 'desams'. This was the smallest unit of the kingdom. A council of military Nayars governed the desam or 2 or 3 desams together, among whose functions was that of maintaining law and order, looking after the local temple of the military Nayar goddess (Bhagavati).

Desams were grouped into 'nads'. Nads had (1) a chief (2) an assembly of military Nagars (3) carried on the cult of Bhagavati and (4) the Nad chief led the desam contingent in war.

The king himself directly ruled the nads nearest to his capital. Those nads, which were a middle distance away, were ruled by chiefs who were feudatories. The chiefs of the nads on the boundaries were more like subordinate allies than feudatories,

⁴⁰ Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, pp. 36, 37.

having a greater measure of independence. Kathleen Gough⁴¹ says that the military training of the Nayar male started from the age of 7. After puberty he was publicly armed by the nad chief or the king. She says that the 'sambandham' system of 'marriage' and the Nayar kinship organisation eminently suited the military needs of the Nayar social organisation, as it freed the men from paternal responsibilities and allowed them to be quartered anywhere in the kingdom. In northern Malabar she points out where the local chiefs frequently broke loose or owed a tenuous allegiance to the king, Nayar men often worked on the land themselves, instead of being shifted around like soldiers continuously. Here marriage was even patrilocal and polyandry unknown.

The Nayars go in also for the un-Brahmanical practice of blood sacrifice.⁴²

Enough examples have been given to show fairly clearly that the military Nayars differ considerably from the Coorgs and the Rajputs in their marriage and kinship organisation. Their practices with respect to these matters again have little resemblance to general Brahmanical principles. The local Nambudri Brahman maintains patrilineal descent and patrilocal marriage but allows only the eldest son to marry and inherit property. The other sons can establish relations with women of the Royal caste.

In spite of these differences with Brahmanical principles of kinship, marriage and blood sacrifice, the military Nayars are high caste, next only to the Nambudris and the Royal Caste.

We have examined briefly several dominant castes of India. The conclusions that seem to emerge from the material are these : (1) The dominant castes are not homogenous in their customs and beliefs. The Nayars are matrilineal, whereas the others are not. The Coorg bury their dead, the others cremate. The preferred type of marriage among the Coorg and the Marathas is cross-cousin marriage, but among the Marathas it is matrilinear cross-cousin marriage, whereas among the Coorg both types prevail. Some of the higher families in Rajasthan practise matrilinear cross-cousin marriage, but the bulk of the Rajputs in Northern India do not seem to do so, though unlike other caste Hindus they may marry

⁴¹ K. Gough, *Changing kinship wages in the setting of political and Economical change among the Nayars.*

⁴² Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, p. 392.

freely into their mother's clan. The Coorg have both widow re-marriage and divorce which the Marathas and the Rajputs (at least ideally) forbid.

Details of ritual vary considerably. With respect to diet the Nayar and the Coorg do not eat beef, similar to the Rajput and the Maratha. But the Coorg eat both the domestic and the wild pig. Some Rajputs—the Bundela for instance—eat wild pork but not the domestic variety. The Marathas do not eat pork at all.

(2) Nevertheless all these groups attach themselves to the Kshatriya varna and connect themselves with Hindu mythological figures. The Brahmans of Malabar and other castes however, regard the Nayars as Sudras. Srinivas also classifies the castes of South India into Brahmans, Sudras and Untouchables—there being strictly speaking, perhaps, no Twice-Born Castes there.⁴³

This connecting up their origins with the mythological figures of antiquity is done for reasons, it would seem, of social prestige, and is connected with their common structural position as rulers in the society. Wherever Brahmanical mythology has spread among the population to any extent, it has been advantageous to these groups to demonstrate their links with the heroes of this sacred literature. They thus gain not only in prestige, but also obtain the sanctions of this literature to confirm and strengthen their peculiar position in society.

(3) A large number of customs which these groups possess—particularly their diet and drink—are different both from local and from general Brahmanical rules regarding them. Nevertheless they occupy a high caste position. As I have already suggested this does not support Stevenson's statement that a high caste status goes necessarily with the degree of adherence to the rules of behaviour emanating from the Pollution Concept. If a caste has sufficient secular power, it would seem, that it can go a long way in violating Brahmanical canons. It may be argued that in the case of the Coorg the Brahmanical influence is comparatively recent, but this is not so in the case of the others. That the possession of secular power enables the dominant caste to diverge from Brahmanical rules of conduct or maintain a somewhat separate code is still more sharply underlined, when we contrast the

⁴³ Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs*, p. 25.

extremely punctilious Brahmanical behaviour of the caste traditionally next to the Rajputs in the caste hierarchy in Northern India—the Banias, whose status is nevertheless lower than that of the Rajputs. Russell says regarding the Banias of the Central Provinces that they are very strict about food. "The majority of them abstain from all kinds of flesh food and alcoholic liquor. The Kasarwain sub-caste are reported to eat the flesh of clean animals and perhaps others of the lower sub-castes may also do so, but the Banias are probably stricter than any other caste in their adherence to a vegetable diet. Many of them also regard onions and garlic as impure food." Enthoven says of the Vanias or Banias of Western India that they are strict vegetarians and the use of liquor is forbidden them. They eat food cooked by Brahmans only.⁴⁵ According to Crooke the Banias of the U.P. are strict vegetarians and eschew liquor. Carstairs reports that the Banas of Deoli in Rajasthan are strict vegetarians, do not drink and when asked "What were the distinguishing features of their caste, Banias invariably dwelt upon their strict observance of respecting and sparing all forms of life. Whereas Brahmans in Deoli were vegetarian, Banias would profess to be still more scrupulous, forswearing all tuberous vegetables, and all fruits with numerous pips, in case they were guilty of taking the life of a single seed."⁴⁶ In short the Banias out-Brahman the Brahman. Nevertheless in spite of their great scrupulousness in observing the regulations arising from the Pollution Concept they are ranked below the Rajputs. This demonstrates that caste status does not depend only on the observance of these ritual rites. It also seems to indicate the high position of the Brahman is due to more reasons than the observance of these ritual rules (which again the Brahmans of certain areas do not observe in full). This question of the Brahman's status we shall discuss later.

Mayer remarks that under present conditions non-Brahman vegetarians have a somewhat undecided status in the village he studied, which is approximately equal to that of the Rajput. But this does not contradict my point. For such castes should, by their Brahmanical habits have a position superior to, not inferior or even equal to, Rajputs.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 126.

⁴⁵ Op. cit. p. 426.

⁴⁶ Op. cit. p. 119.

⁴⁷ Mayer S. W., *Journal of Anthropology*, 1956, p. 123.

In certain respects, then, there would appear to be in caste Hindu society two different types of high caste behaviour. Stevenson calls ritual behaviour that which is associated with ritual status, and secular behaviour which is associated with secular status. Can we divide behaviour, status, beliefs and ideas in Hindu society into ritual and secular categories? Srinivas points out, and we have discussed this in the first chapter, that ritual elements pervade Hindu society. It is better to assume that in the same system of ranking there appear two different models, two different caste norms—that of the Brahman and that of the dominant caste which have a peculiar relation towards each other.

THE DOMINANT CASTE — BRAHMAN RELATIONSHIP

Srinivas has noted this and marks the discrepancy between the formal hierarchy of purity in the Mysore village of Rampura and the actual status relationship of day-to-day life. He says "Discrepancy is due to the fact that, in conceptualizing the hierarchy, ritual considerations are dominant, while in the day-to-day relationships between castes economic, political and "Western" factors also play an important part. Thus the relation between the poor Brahman priest and the rich peasant headman of the village is a complicated one, the Brahman being aware of the secular power of the headman, and the headman showing deference to the Brahman's ritual position."⁴⁸

From the accounts, we have given of the dominant castes in various areas, this complexity of relationship between it and the Brahman caste would seem to exist in all these areas. Carstairs writes,⁴⁹ "These substances (meat and wine), if taken in strict measure, were believed to add to the warrior's virility by helping him acquire semen, and with it the qualities of courage and strength which its possession conveyed; and yet there was always the uncomfortable knowledge that meat and wine were abjured by the Brahmans, in the name of the religion which they were bound to protect. Rajputs who became seriously intent upon religion might forswear meat and 'daru' altogether, as did Vikram Singh, but it was more usual to compromise, to insist that one took them only in medicinal doses 'niyam se' (within measure)

⁴⁸ *Village India*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ Carstairs, *Twice-born*, pp. 109, 110.

which could do no harm. In real life, however, this decorous restraint was not always maintained...."

Of late there seems to have set in a general tendency among these castes to adopt more Brahmanical ways. This is perhaps more clearly marked among the Coorg. Take the case of the Amma Coorg. "In November 1834 some Amma Coorgs donned the sacred thread at Belmuri on the banks of the Kaveri. They became followers of the Brahman monastery at Ramchandrapura in Mysore. In 1847 the head of this monastery sent them instructions as to the ritual they were entitled to perform. The Amma Coorgs of Kiggatnad, who had not donned the sacred thread, did so a few years later at the Irpu temple under the auspices of the Brahman monastery at Kanur in South Canara. Amma Coorgs are now vegetarians and teetotallers and nowadays they constitute an endogamous unit. In the last few years of the reign of the last king of Coorg, Amma Coorgs claimed to be Kaveri Brahmans.⁵⁰

Now according to Iyer the Amma Coorgs were the traditional priests of the Coorg.⁵¹ Their adoption of Brahmanism was a powerful force in sanskritising the other Coorg. Nevertheless the past dies hard. For instance, as I have said, the main body of Coorgs propitiate their dead ancestors by offerings of meat and liquor with the Banna acting as oracle. This offering is non-Brahmanical. At the same time they make offerings of rice flour balls under the guidance of a Brahman priest. Further Coorgs offer meat and liquor to Shiva and Parvati his wife, but in the temples of Tale Kaveri, Rameshwar, in Irpu and so on, where Brahman priests officiate, only offerings of fruit and flowers are permitted.⁵²

In a similar fashion the Nayars of Malabar perform some blood sacrifices from which Brahmans are absent. Thurston describes a Nayar festival called Vishu. Here cocks and goats are sacrificed and no Nambudri Brahman priests are present. A type of priest called the Mussad, who claim Brahmanhood, but are of dubious origin officiate during these ceremonies. The chief Mussad priest chops off the heads of the goats and the cocks,

⁵⁰ Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorg*, pp. 34, 35

⁵¹ Iyyer, *Coorg Tribes and Castes*, p. 64.

⁵² Srinivas, *op. cit.* p. 227.

reciting his mantrams all the time, in the temple. The next day the temple is thoroughly swept and cleaned, and then the Mussads go out and 5 Nambudri Brahmans again enter before sunrise.⁵³ Again in the cock festival at Cranganore, the officiating priests are a sect called Adigals, and the Brahmans are purposely excluded from participation in the puja ceremonies.⁵⁴

In spite of non-Brahmanical customs and ritual practices by these dominant castes the general trend seems to be towards a greater degree of Sanskritisation or following Brahmanical codes and regulations. Russell states that the Rajputs of the Central Provinces used to take liquor freely in classical times "but have had to conform to the prohibition of liquor imposed by the Brahmans on high-caste Hindus."⁵⁵

Kathleen Gough notes the increased Sanskritisation that has set in among the Nayars. She notes how vegetarianism has and is increasing among them, together with an increasing abandonment of their own distinctive forms of ancestor worship and their own distinctive deities for Sanskritic goods and goddesses.⁵⁶

We have noted the increasing Sanskritization of the Coorg. Even when the Coorg sticks to his non-Sanskritic customs and ritual, Srinivas notes their ambivalent attitude towards them. Speaking of the non-vegetarian food offered by the Coorgs to their deities Srinivas says, "Coorgs express the dietetic preference of their deities by saying that they 'Lost their caste', a certain ambivalence can be detected in this attitude which presumably prevails towards their own diet."

We have seen how Carstairs expresses the misgivings of a number of Rajputs with respect to their diet, drinking habits and ways so different from the Brahmanical religion they were supposed to defend (cf. above).

It would seem that duality characterises the position of a number of dominant castes. Ibbetson states how the king in the Punjab hills was the 'fount' of all castes, promoting various individuals to various castes.⁵⁷ Hutton says, "If the secular ruler

⁵³ Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. 5, pp. 392, 393.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

⁵⁵ Russell, *Caste and Tribes of Central Provinces*, Vol. 4, p. 423.

⁵⁶ Gough, *J.R.A.I.* No. 1, 1952.

⁵⁷ Punjab Census Report, p. 221.

was the ultimate authority during the early period of Indian history, he certainly continued to be so in the middle ages. Ballal Sen, King of Bengal in the 12th century prescribed the order of precedence of different castes of Brahmans in his dominions, and raised the status of some castes, degrading others.⁵⁸ O'Malley points out how in the 14th century prince Hara Singh Deva of North Bihar "settled the respective ranks of 3 sections of the Maithil sub-caste of Brahmans and made marriage rules for them; and it should be noted that he was not a Brahman but a Kshatriya."⁵⁹ This same Hara Singh Deva later on became the king of Nepal where till the middle of the 20th century castes were under state control; law courts took cognizance of castes involving expulsion from caste, breaches of commensal rules, cow slaughter, and also determined the caste of mixed marriage.⁶⁰ In Cochin the Kshatriya Maharaja acted as the final authority in caste matters for Nam-budri Brahmans and had the power to raise persons from one caste to another, while final expulsion from a caste required his sanction.⁶¹

In Rajputana cases, which could not be settled by caste councils, were referred to the courts or to the ruler himself, and Ibbetson reported the creation of a new caste from a section of the Minar by the Maharaja of Alwar, who also decreed at the same time rules to govern hypergamy between the new and old castes.⁶² In Indore the Maharaja appointed a council of persons learned in Hindu law to decide and advise him on caste questions. The council was subject to his powers and he could override their decisions. The Maratha rules of Gwalior and Baroda acted similarly.⁶³ Ibbetson reported how in the Kangra hills Rajput princes classified Brahmans, promoted from one caste to another and readmitted expelled persons.⁶⁴

Risley relates how king Ballal Sen of Bengal conducted an inquiry into the personal endowments of the Rarhi Brahmans with respect to their nine qualities mainly—achar, ceremonial purity;

⁵⁸ Hutton, *Caste in India*, p. 94.

⁵⁹ O'Malley, *Indian Caste Customs*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Hutton, *op. cit.* p. 94.

⁶¹ Marion, Report on the Census of Cochin, 1911, p. 69 and Moloney, Census of Madras, 1911, p. 180.

⁶² Punjab Castes, p. 16.

⁶³ O'Malley, *Caste Customs*, p. 20.

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.* pp. 16, 101.

vinaya, discipline; vidya, learning; pratistha, reputation for purity; tirthadarsana, zeal in pilgrimage; nisthas, piety; avritti, observance of legal marriages; tapas, ascetic self devotion; dana, liberality. The Rarhi Brahmins are represented as divided into 56 'gains' or headships of villages, which were reserved for them, and might not be encroached upon by Brahmins of other orders. Risley says "It is interesting to trace in Ballal Sen's enquiry the survival or reassertion of the principal referred to above, as recognized in ancient times, that the Brahmanhood of the Brahmins depends not merely on birth, but also upon personal endowments. It is a question of virtue, not a question of decent. Ballal Sen, of course, could not go as far as this.

"The time had long passed when a Kshatriya could transform himself into a Brahmin by penance and self-denial. But the Sen monarch sought to reaffirm the ancient principle, so far as was then possible, by testing the qualifications of each Rarhi family for the priestly office and classifying them in the order of their virtue, according to the results of this examination."⁶⁵ Some say that 22 'gains' were raised to the highest distinction but later on king Lakshman Sen discarded 14 'gains' on account of their misconduct.⁶⁶ The behaviour of these two kings is in line with the behaviour of the princes and members of the dominant castes in the various localities and states cited in the preceding pages.

The Rajas of the Simla Hill states, of Bastar and Jashpur in the Central Provinces, of the Orissa Feudatory states, all exercised the final power in caste matters, including expulsion from and restriction to caste, and had disciplinary powers over Brahmin as well as non-Brahmin offenders.⁶⁷ The Maharaja of Manipur in Assam wielded similar power. So much power had the principle of the secular power being the final arbiter of caste, that the Muslim Mughal rulers of Bengal exercised the right to sanction readmission to caste.⁶⁸

Hutton thinks that it is probable that the powers of the secular ruler in caste questions have been allowed to lapse in many states, and Ibbetson attributes this to the Mughal conquest. This

⁶⁵ Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 145.

⁶⁶ Op. cit. p. 146.

⁶⁷ *Caste in India*, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Hutton, op. cit. p. 96.

deprived the Hindus of their Rajput leaders and left matters more in the hands of the caste councils and the Brahmans.⁶⁹ With the advent of the British administration the power of the secular rulers declined still more or practically disappeared, their functions being over by the new administration, which had explicit instructions not to interfere in caste matters.⁷⁰ This would strengthen the caste councils and the Brahmans still further. The increasing Brahmanisation of the dominant castes may be partly due to this factor. For whilst their own powers and influence have relatively declined that of the Brahmans have in certain ways increased, especially with respect to the more "Sanskritized" mode of living adopted by various castes, which we shall have occasion to note in a later chapter. In such a situation the dominant caste unable to assert itself as much as in the past, might think it worth its while to impress public opinion by more 'Sanskritized' behaviour in some respects. This may be one of the reasons why the Rajputs of the Central Provinces gave up drinking.

Other trends are also developing among the dominant castes and Cohn points out how while the Chamars seek to adopt upper caste ways, the upper caste Rajputs are turning to "Westernization," to education in a language denied the Chamars, in short to a culture to which the Chamars have difficulty of access.⁷¹ Srinivas points out the same trend among the dominant Brahmans in Mysore.⁷²

The Journal "Contributions to Indian Sociology" points out that "the decline of the power of the dominant caste in recent years has set in motion "structural" changes of which the full development is yet to be seen."⁷³ We shall discuss some aspects of these changes later. Enough has been shown to demonstrate the considerable powers that secular authority had in adjudicating over the affairs of Brahmans, even to the extent of degrading or expelling some and perhaps, in the past, creating Brahmans also. Hocart⁷⁴ emphasises this aspect of Hindu society and incorrectly denies the simultaneous existence of Brahmanical power with the

⁶⁹ Op. Cit. pp. 15, 101.

⁷⁰ Hutton, op. cit. p. 97.

⁷¹ *Village India*, pp. 67, 74.

⁷² Srinivas, *Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 4, August, 1956.

⁷³ Op. cit. No. 2, April 1958, p. 58 and No. 1, pp. 38-39.

⁷⁴ Hocart, *Caste*, p. 114.

power of the Kshatriya, their interdependence and at the same time the conflict between the two. The "Contributions" points out that the Hocart has tried to resolve the conflict in favour of the Kshatriya by justifiably elevating him as a divine king, initiator and receiver of the conflict. His argument is no less 'ideal' than that of the ancient texts which resolve the conflict in favour of the Brahman. Resolution in favour of either conceals the fact that, whereas from the point of view of either purity (values) or power (behaviour) there is no conflict, in any given local situation there is no question of "either—or, but of both."⁷⁵ In Deoli, in Rajasthan, Carstairs says the Brahmins "were accorded their formal respect as was shown in the traditional exchange of courtesies, the Brahman saying "May you live long and protect the Brahman and the cows", and the Rajput replying "I clasp your feet." In order to command this respect, however, a Brahman must keep to his priestly role, and accord the Rajput the deference due to his temporal position: those who entered politics or business, and had the temerity to dispute the Rajputs' ascendancy, were intemperately abused For the Caste of Banias, on the other hand, no Rajput had a good word."⁷⁶ At the festival of Bhadrakali in Coorg Srinivas shows how the vegetarian Brahman withdraws from the temple while a low caste Panika decapitates a goat. The next day the Brahman returns to purify the temple and temple yard.⁷⁷ "Contributions" commenting on this writes "It is clear from this and from other instances that we are dealing with complementary cults which, in a sense, express the impurity of the Coorgs in relating to the Brahmins. For although the Coorgs are dominant caste and the Brahmins are, in a sense, dependent upon them, the Coorgs have no stakes at all unless the Brahmins are and can be shown to be, their superiors in accordance with the recognized values."⁷⁸ The above is an extremely condensed statement which requires considerable expansion and elucidation. The proposition being made here is that a structural feature of Hindu society is the peculiar relationship of conflict and co-operation between the dominant caste and the Brahmins. In the preceding chapter we noted the duality that

⁷⁵ Op. cit. p. 58.

⁷⁶ Op. cit. p. 114.

⁷⁷ Srinivas, op. cit. pp. 186-189.

⁷⁸ Op. cit. p. 55.

existed in Malabar, for instance, between the king and certain Nambudiri Brahman elements. This is a question of fact. The evidence for this duality is very considerable and some of it has been cited above. On paper it seems inconsistent, but in sociology one deals not with abstract logic but with what is actual, with what exists. Let us see two sets of conditions in which this structural principle is violated and the effects this violation has on social organization. The "Contributions" to "Indian Sociology" points out that there are two kinds of dominant castes "and the reactions upon them of modern conditions may appear to be characteristically different."⁷⁹ The two kinds are the Brahman as dominant and the secular dominant. Dr. Gough discusses in her 'Social Structure of a Tanjore village' the case of a Brahman dominant caste which held directly two-thirds of the village land.⁸⁰

We have discussed the social changes in this village of Kumbapattai in the preceding pages. As a result of these changes the political and economic power of the dominant Brahman caste declined. "The Contributions to Indian Sociology", referring to this says, "The effect of this breakdown of power in Tanjore suggests a pattern which may be found elsewhere. Lower castes divided up into different villages and divided by the conflicts within the dominant caste in those villages, now appear to be rediscovering a sense of unity which, in Tanjore, is associated with the southern anti-Brahman Dravidian movement. It is, however, possible that the fact that the dominant caste is in this case Brahman makes for certain differences. Speaking of the large temple festivals which became open to Adi Dravidas after the Temple Entry Act of 1947, it quotes Dr. Gough, "Even these festivals, however, are now losing their appeal for the lower castes, among whom they are associated with the supremacy of the Brahmans and with religious doctrines in which they no longer have faith."⁸¹ The "Contribution" goes on to say "This reaction is in fact dual, it is against caste as a political power and against Brahmanism because of its association with dominance."⁸² In a situation like this and where the dominant caste is Brahman the result is likely to be a loss of faith in Brahmanism. The basis of the Brahman's power,

⁷⁹ No. 1, op. cit. p. 37.

⁸⁰ *Village India*, p. 36, seq.

⁸¹ *Village India*, p. 36, seq.

⁸² Op. cit. No. 1, pp. 38, 39.

as we shall see in the next chapter, is, what may be termed, 'spiritual'. As a matter of fact it involves the denial of the final value of material prosperity and power. Where this preaching is glaringly disproved by actual practice the effect might well be the spread of unbelief in Brahmanism. In contrast the 'Contributions' points out the village of Madhopur in the U.P., studied by Cohn, where the structural superiority of the Brahmans is left unimpaired by the economic and political quarrels between the dominant Thakurs and the Chamars (op. cit. p. 38). The Brahmans here are not powerful in a secular sense at all.⁸¹

The other contrasting case is where the secular power is against Brahmanism and the Brahmans. Such an example is that of the Maratha uprising against the Moghul power, which to Hindus in general appeared as secular and divested of religious or Brahmanical sanction. The rallying cry of the Maratha population was not any 'national' appeal but "defence of the Brahmans and of cows". The revolt was, Russell says largely engineered by the Maratha Brahmans.⁸² The British Administration, it would seem, learnt this lesson after the uprising of 1857, and since it could not pose as Hindu or Brahmanical, carefully refrained from interfering in caste matters. The point that seems to emerge is that a secular power that goes against Brahmanism and Brahmans faces a possibility of a religious movement directed against it. On the other hand, where the Brahmans have become too obviously powerful in the secular sense, clashes between them and the other castes leads to anti-Brahmanical movements, as the present conditions in Tanjore District seem to indicate. These practical instances cited seem to confirm the fact that a structural principle of Hindu society is the combination of co-operation and conflict between the Brahmans and the dominant caste. It is interesting to note that this principle seems to have been in operation for a very long period. We have seen how among the ancient Iranians the priesthood was formally acknowledged to be the supreme group, (it was actually a caste), though secular power was in the hands of the king and the aristocracy.

An interesting parallel can be pointed out in the concept of the pair of gods—Mitra and Varuna in Vedic literature. Mitra

⁸¹ *Village India*, p. 53, seq.

⁸² Russell, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces*, Vol. IV, p. 207.

is the calm one and the friend, Varuna is violent, possessing power; Mitra is the essence of the Brahman, and Varuna of the Kshatriya. This seems to show the existence of kingly and priestly power, of co-operation and conflict between them side by side in ancient Vedic society. An interesting prayer in the Vedic literature says, "Strengthen the priest, strengthen the Kshatriya."⁸⁵ Later on the Satpatha Brahmana says that although Kshatra meaning, 'imperium' and Brahma meaning 'Supreme Being' are interdependent, the Brahman who represents Brahma can do without Kshatra but not vice versa.

This is, of course, the statement of the Brahman that he can do without the Kshatriya. Nevertheless the fact that they are stated to be interdependent should be noted. The fact of conflict between the Brahman and the Kshatriya is mentioned often in ancient Hindu literature. The best-known instance is the story of the famous warrior Brahman Parasuram who rid the world of Kshatriyas altogether, as narrated in the Ramayana. Rhys Davids⁸⁷ pointed out how Kshatriya writers of the Jatakas use the term 'low-born' for Brahmans (Jataka 5.257). In the Digha Nikaya the Kshatriya would not regard even the son of a Kshatriya by a Brahman wife as a true-born Kshatriya.⁸⁸ The festival of the "Rakhi-bandhan", however, expresses the unity of the Brahman and the Kshatriya. As we are not dealing with an historical investigation, we shall not pursue this point further, but the above instances do seem to reinforce the proposition that a feature of the structure of Hindu society has been this duality in the relationship between the dominant caste and the Brahmans, in the past as well as in the present.

In this sense Bougle's theory that the Brahman is the corner stone of Hindu society is like Hocart's theory, one-sided in its emphasis. He points out how the eminence or baseness of a caste is determined above all by the relations which it has with the Brahman castes, with questions like whether the Brahmans will accept gifts, water and so on from its members or not.⁸⁹ He

⁸⁵ *Vaiasaneyi Samhita*, 5, 27.

⁸⁶ *Satpatha Brahmana* 5.57 quoted in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 2, April pp. 57, 58.

⁸⁷ *Buddhist India*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ *Op. cit.* III, 1-24.

⁸⁹ *Contributions*, p. 23.

also shows how other castes tend to imitate the Brahmans in diet, marriage customs and so on (ibid p. 26). Nevertheless the power of the dominant caste particularly with respect to adjudicating over Brahman affairs in the recent past is also a fact (cf. above), as well as its deviation from Brahmanical practices. Not only do the Brahmans serve as a model to be imitated by the lower castes, the local dominant caste is also a model. Srinivas narrates how the Okkaligas and the Gaudas of Coorg imitate the dominant Coorg caste and often style themselves as Coorg (Srinivas, op. cit.). In North India also there exists a widespread tendency particularly on the part of low castes to pass off as Rajputs. In the following pages we shall give an account of these trends as revealed in various Census Reports. The desire to change the caste title arises no doubt from a desire to change social status, to climb higher on the social ladder. But the attempt to change the caste title involves inevitably also changes in customs and practices, by imitating the caste whose title one wants to adopt. It does not matter which motivation was prior—rising in social status or being a Rajput—because the one seems hardly different from the other. In these cases preference for a Brahman title is also sometimes shown, but the number is much less than the preference for a Rajput title. The choice of a Rajput title is undoubtedly also determined by a number of considerations other than its abstract desirability. Considerations like the fact that it is easier to pass off as a Rajput rather than a Brahman—the latter requiring at least a show of knowledge of rituals, of some of the scriptures literature and so on. Again the Rajput way of life is easier to attain than the Brahman's. Nevertheless the fact remains that the larger number chose Rajput titles.

The U.P. Census Report of 1931 states that this movement for changing caste names had been used by various castes for pressing their claims to a higher status. In 1901 and 1911 claims came mainly from individuals, but in 1921 caste sabhas had begun to spring up and began to press these claims. Since 1921 the caste sabha movement had developed to a great extent. Alongside with these claims was the tendency to modify their social and religious practices e.g., the Doms started imitating orthodox Hindu rituals, the Chamars gave up flaying the skins of dead animals, the Dhobis refused to wash for the Chamars and Bhangis, and the

Nais to shave for them, to name only a few. The following Table gives an account of this movement to change their caste titles on the part of a number of castes.

In the U.P. in the 1931 census the number of the lowest castes aspiring to a change of caste names had greatly increased over previous censuses.

<i>Title of Brahman desired</i>	<i>Title of Rajput desired</i>	<i>Title of Vaishya desired</i>
(1) Barhai (VL)	(1) Ahar, Aheriya (M)	(1) Teli
(2) Lohar (VL)	(2) Ahir (M)	
(3) Nai (VL)	(3) Bhar (VL)	
(4) Naik (VL)	(4) Bhotiya (VL)	
	(5) Chamar (VL)	
	(6) Darzi (L)	
	(7) Dhobi (VL)	
	(8) Gaderiya (M)	
	(9) Jat (M)	
	(10) Kahar (M)	
	(11) Kori (VL)	
	(12) Kumbhar (VL)	
	(13) Orh (VL)	

* (VL = Very low caste rank; M = middle).

Out of a total of 20 castes, 13 wanted a Rajput name; 4 a Brahman name and 1 a Vaishya name.

To what groups did the claimants for a Rajput name belong? If we group them according to this scale—High, Middle, Low and Very Low, of the 13 claimants to a Rajput title 4 belonged to the middle group and 9 were very low castes. In the case of the Brahman title all 4 were very low. The solitary Vaishya claim was made by a group with a status near it. The same would to some extent apply to claimants for Rajputs status like the Ahirs, Aheris, Aheriya Gaderias and Jats, who belong to the middle group. Their logic was apparently different from that of the very low castes who did not want to rise one stage above but rather to jump over the whole staircase right to the top, whether as Rajput or Brahman. None of the very low castes aspired to any title lower than that of a Brahman or a Rajput in the U.P.

Let us take the case of Gwalior in the Census of 1931

*Title of Brahman
claimed*

(1) Malis (M)

*Title of Rajput
claimed*

(1) Kirar (VL)

(2) Minas (M)

(3) Malis (M)

(4) Nais (VL)

(5) Sumars (L)

Of the 6 claims, 5 were for the Rajput title and one for a Brahman title. Of the 5 claims for a Rajput title 3 were low or very low.

In the Central India Agency the 1931 Census records these claims.

*Title of Brahman
claimed*

(1) Nai (VL)

(2) Bhat (H)

(3) Sutar (VL)

(4) Lohar (L)

*Title of Rajput
claimed*

(1) Kurmi (M)

(2) Lodhi (M)

(3) Mali (M)

(4) Khangar (VL)

The Chamars claimed the title of Yadavas. For the Rajput title there were 3 middle castes and one very low. Of the 4 claimants to the Brahman title the Bhat was high and his logic seems different to that of the 3 others who are low or very low. The Census Report remarks that the Central India Agency the caste organizations hardly exist and there was no feverish activity on this issue.

In the Rajputana Agency the 1931 Census Report states that "Although the Brahmans hold pride of place... the Rajputs as rulers are in an unassailable position of temporal power and owners of soil...".

The desire for higher social status has resulted in several castes applying for a change in a hitherto accepted nomenclature and the desire for Brahman or Kshatriya status". It however remarks that the trend is less strong than that in what was British India.

<i>Brahman title claimed</i>	<i>Rajput title claimed</i>
(1) Nai (VL)	(1) Daroge (VL)
(2) Sevagi (H)	(2) Mali (M)
(3) Khati or	(3) Kurim (M)
(4) Sutar (VL)	(4) Darzi (VL)
	(5) Chippi (VL)

The Sevagi is a temple devotee but the other two claimants for a Brahman title are very low, and so are 3 of the 5 claimants for a Rajput title.

The U.P., Gwalior, the Central Indian Agency and Rajputana are rather similar areas and a comparison can be made between them. Of the 42 claims made by different castes, 27 were claims for a Rajput title or roughly 64% of the total. 60% of the claims for a Rajput title were advanced by very low castes (about 16 in number).

13 of the 42 claims were for a Brahman title—that is about 30% of the total. Of the claims for a Brahman title 77% came from very low castes (about 10 in number).

About twice as many castes aspired to become Rajputs rather than Brahmans. One can only conjecture the reasons. It may be that the Rajput's secular domination proved a more attractive ideal, or, as I had suggested, it was easier to pass off as a Rajput than a Brahman. But in the 1931 census the aspiration for a Rajput and Brahman status by very low castes is unmistakable. This was part of their attempt to Sanskritize themselves. It reflected also the values that they regarded desirable.

We have thus a certain difference in the systems of beliefs as between the high caste Hindus and the low castes. There is also an attempt on the part of the low caste Hindus to bridge this gap by changing their own practices and by taking a Rajput or a Brahman name. The high castes look down on the beliefs, practices and ideals of the low castes. The low castes react in two ways (a) by sticking closer to what is their own and (b) by imitating the high castes in order to rise in the social hierarchy, in order to attain ritual equality with them. The high castes on the one hand welcome the tendency not to eat beef and to marry

their daughters young, but resent the low caste's uppishness in adopting certain high caste ways such as wearing the sacred thread, changing their names, titles and dress. A low caste Noniya in Madhopur village, studied by Cohn, got beaten up by the Rajputs for wearing the sacred thread. Many similar incidents can be cited.

The process of change is not all one-way. Some of the high castes again will absorb or adopt some of the beliefs and practices of the low castes like the worship of certain deities, eating certain flesh foods, changing certain marriage customs. An example of this is the adoption of four local godlings of non-Sanskritic origin by the local Brahmans.⁹⁰

These are some of the aspects of the processes of interaction that goes on in caste Hindu society. It may be argued that, if a society has to continue as a society, this process of interaction must go on in the sphere of its ideas and beliefs, when these differ for various sections of the population, otherwise society would split apart. This means that, if it has to continue as a society, it must accept a certain minimum of common values or tend to do so. When the area of common values shrinks, social tensions would increase to the breaking point. But sooner or later unless it is physically possible to partition society, one set or another of the conflicting belief systems, or a compromise between them must prevail in order, as functional anthropologists put it, that society might continue to function. This might explain the tendency to adopt high caste ways by lower castes and the converse process.

We have noted the increasing tendency of the local dominant caste to adopt Brahmanical practices of late (cf. above). The degree of its divergence from Brahmanical norms depends very much, it would seem, on the local situation and the Brahman customs there. Where cross-cousin marriage is prevalent among a large number of castes even the Brahmans will practise it (as in Maharashtra and in various parts of South India). Similarly the Brahmans consume flesh in Bengal and in Kashmir as do many other castes. Too flagrant a violation of local norms, however, leads often to the degradation of the violating groups. Ibbetson points out the example of the Chauhan Rajputs of the Delhi

⁹⁰ Marriot, *Village India*, pp. 191 seq.

area who were degraded because they started the practice of widow remarriage.⁹¹ They are no longer regarded as Rajputs now. The Sahnsars of Hushyarpur, who were admittedly Rajputs till only a few generations ago, now rank with the Arains for resorting to agriculture. The Chauhans of Karnal have taken to weaving and become Sheikhs.⁹² The Taga Brahmans of the Delhi division lost their Brahman status, as did the Dharks of Delhi for marrying their widows.⁹³ Thus the Brahmans themselves are not immune from their own laws.

The operational force of the system of (the local) Hindu ideas and beliefs finds another illustration in an interesting case in the history of the Raj Gond society of middle India. In the middle ages there was a time, when Gond ruling houses ruled kingdoms equal in power to many a Rajput dynasty and wielded similar power and prestige. They differed from Hindu dominant castes in that, they did not form an endogamous aristocracy, and they also ignored wholesale the Concept of Pollution to the extent of eating beef. Then the Marathas conquered these kingdoms and destroyed the power of many of these aristocrats. Today according to Firer-Haimendorf, whilst not being classed by local Hindu castes as beef-eating untouchables, their rank is not far above that level in their eyes. They certainly do not compare, for instance, with the conquered Jhala Rajputs of Kasandra (Gujarat) who are regarded as second class Rajputs.⁹⁴

Perhaps the Gonds feel that, if they once accepted the supremacy of the Brahmans, their lot might be reduced to that of the untouchables. Hence for a Gond to accept cooked food from a Brahman is to court excommunication from Gond society. As a result the Brahman, in turn, has to recognize the Gond on a plane different from that of the Hindu population, similar to the beef-eating Muslims and Christians, and to refrain from treating them as untouchables.⁹⁵ But the lot of the Gonds, former aristo-

⁹¹ Report on the Punjab Census of 1881. p. 175.

⁹² Ibid, p. 175.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 174, 175.

⁹⁴ C. von Firer-Haimendorf : (1) *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (Vol. 18 pt. 3, 1956 pp. 510, 511); (2) *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad, a Peasant Culture of the Deccan.* (Book I pp. 53-58) (London, Methuen, 1948).

⁹⁵ The Raj Gonds, p. 56.

crat or commoner, is not like that of other conquered former caste aristocrats.

We stated before that the high caste status generally held by the dominant caste was not due to its ritual practices because of the divergence that these often have from Brahmanical rules, and pointed out many examples. We must now qualify the statement by showing that this divergence depends on the local situation and, as shown above, on the time factor. The degradation of the Chauhans, one-time rulers of Hindu Delhi, is an example of the force which the belief system also has on the status of certain castes. "Contributions to Indian Sociology" remarks "We know that the status of a particular caste is not measured immediately in terms of all-India notions but in relation to a particular local hierarchy headed by a particular Brahman caste. To exaggerate a little for the sake of emphasis this is to say that a caste in one area may have the highest status possible under the Brahmans of that area, while continuing to practice customs which in another area would place it almost at the bottom of the hierarchy. If the Brahmans in any area are not vegetarians then vegetarianism is unlikely to be a measure of ritual status. It seems to us then that, broadly speaking, a caste which is truly dominant must come immediately below the Brahmans in the local hierarchy and the standards of the Brahmans will to a certain extent be influenced by the customs of that dominant caste."⁹⁶

The study of caste status has primarily to be a study of the local hierarchy and the local conditions. Elsewhere the 'Contributions' makes the significant remark that "the consistency of India lies at the level not of culture but of relations."⁹⁷ Prior to going into an examination of All-India cultural standards one feels local analyses of local caste society and its structure is needed. It is against this local background primarily that assessments should be made.

Against this local background one must measure the degree of divergence of the dominant caste from the local Brahmanical practices and the influence the dominant caste in its turn exercises on the local Brahmans. Gluckman remarks that conflict is an

⁹⁶ Op. cit. No. 1, p. 32.

⁹⁷ Op. cit. No. 2, p. 56.

essential part in the integration of the social structure; that the social structure functions not only through co-operation but also through conflict. Thus the conflict between the king and his people kept the social structure stable in one of the Bantu kingdoms. Rebellion on the part of some of the king's subjects led by some nobles served to strengthen the kingship (a) by reaffirming the principle of kingship—for the leaders of the revolt attempted to substitute the king, not destroy the institution; (b) by attempting to remove popular grievances through replacing a 'bad' king by the promise of a better one. This conflict, Gluckman points out, actually helped to strengthen the structure of these Bantu societies.⁹⁸ Observers of Indian society have sometimes seen one aspect or the other. Thus Wiser could only see the harmonious co-operation of the various castes in his village of Karimpur in the U.P. (Hindu Jajmani System). On the other hand Sherring could say that caste is division, hatred, jealousy and distrust between neighbours.⁹⁹ Bougle points out that caste invites three tendencies—repulsion; hierarchy; and hereditary specialisation; and these three must be borne in mind, if one wishes to give a complete definition of the caste system.¹⁰⁰ Specialisation implies co-operation, and repulsion and hierarchy are factors which might lead to conflict. The principle of conflict as an integrating force, which Gluckman pointed out in African society, seems to operate also in Hindu caste society. The co-operation and the conflict, for instance, between the Brahman and the local dominant caste seem to be one of the wheels on which the local caste society, so to say, travels. By posing a different model to that of the dominant caste, a 'spiritual model', the Brahman, in principle, serves to act as a check on the dominant caste. On the other hand the monopoly of political and economical power by the dominant caste should deprive the Brahman of the same and help to keep him anchored to his 'spiritual' role. The Brahman again is supported and defended by the power of the dominant caste. This is why the Brahmans bless the Rajputs "May you defend Brahmans and cows" (cf. Carstairs above), and it was with this appeal that Shivaji went to the Marathas. The dominant caste again is de-

⁹⁸ Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa, Frailty in Authority*, pp. 27-53.

⁹⁹ *Hindu Tribes and Castes III* (Cal. 1879), p. 218, 235—quoted by Bougle, *Contributions to Indian Society*, No. 2, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 9.

pendent on the beliefs and ideas preached by the Brahman and his practices, which serve to define and buttress its social function and position. In the Bhadrakali festival Srinivas shows that the Coorgs acknowledge the supremacy of the Brahmins, because this is an affirmation of a system of beliefs and ideas which validates their own status.¹⁰¹ Again in Rajasthan the Rajput reply to the Brahman's blessing is "I clasp your feet." (cf. Carstairs).

Max Weber points this out in his 'Religion of India'. He says, "By the time of the first universal monarchies, the independent priesthood had become so firmly established in its possession of spiritual authority . . . as a "caste" with fixed educational prerequisites of office holding, that it could no longer be shaken." (op. cit. p. 142). No Hindu prince or great king, he continues, was able to claim pontifical power (op. cit. p. 142). But on the other hand he shows how in India, "the priesthood, holding its own beside the political rulers, had to take into account the sovereign world of political power. The priests recognized the autonomous rulers of this world simply because they had to" (op. cit. p. 143). "Brahmanical theory" on the other hand, he says, "served in an unequalled manner to tame the subjects religiously." (op. cit. p. 130).

A similar principle of co-operation and at the same time conflict seems to operate in the relations between the dominant caste and the subordinate castes. In everyday life the fact of subordination, of conflict, is expressed through the taboos on food, drink, dress, touch and so on. Co-operation is expressed in the exchange of goods and services by the subordinate castes for food and protection from the dominant caste. Both these aspects are dramatised in the common village festivals and in the worship of village deities, where both rank and hierarchy as well as co-operation are symbolised. Describing a festival, the 'puja' of 'Bhooian' in the village of Mohana in the U.P., D. N. Majumdar shows how the initiation is taken by an elderly prominent Thakur (Rajput). The Mali (belonging to the gardener caste) catches an escaped sheep. The 'Bhaksor' (belonging to the very low basket maker caste) announces the festival by the beat of the drum. The puja is performed by two Thakurs pouring 'ghee' (clarified butter), dry fruits, barley and oil mixed in sugar as directed by the Brahman

¹⁰¹ Op. cit. pp. 186-199.

'pandit' presiding. All the villagers, of all castes, participate in it.¹⁰²

Another interesting example of the symbolical co-operation between different castes is expressed in the ritual centred round the birth of a Thakur child in the same village of Mohana. The Brahman is called to make the horoscope of the child and in return is paid a rupee, if a boy is born, and half that amount in the case of a girl child. The Blacksmith presents a knife to the child, and is presented with 2½ to 5 seers of grain by the Thakur father. The Barber acts as a messenger and serves at the feast, and is given food in return. The Pasi carries the news and is given food and so on.¹⁰³

This is a line of enquiry which requires extensive investigation and, it is not the business of this book here to conduct it. We have merely indicated an aspect of Hindu caste society associated with the peculiar Brahman-dominant caste relationships. The investigation of Hindu caste society seems to have unfolded in a series of stages. Observers first observed either the co-operative side or the mutually exclusive side of the functioning of castes. The fact of hierarchy was also noted. Recent village studies have served to show how the co-operation, the hierarchial system and the conflict within it operates, by studies of the unifying role of the dominant caste and its relation to the Brahmans. Further investigation will undoubtedly throw much interesting light on the workings of Indian caste society.

Finally a study of the Brahman-dominant caste relationship shows that in spite of the ambivalent relations between the two, their co-operation and conflict, everywhere in the final analysis, the dominant caste acknowledges the supremacy of the Brahman in the caste hierarchy, at least formally, in spite of all its powers of adjudication over Brahman affairs. This is almost unanimously agreed to by the other castes as well. (It would seem that an exception would be the Panch-Brahman group of castes described by Dube,¹⁰⁴ who appear to see themselves equal to the Brahman.) What is acknowledged is a principle represented by the individual Brahman, the principle of Brahmanhood. The affairs of the

¹⁰² D. N. Majumdar, *Caste in Communication in an Indian Village*, p. 251.

¹⁰³ *Op. cit.* p. 39.

¹⁰⁴ *India's Villages*, p. 183.

Brahman caste, over which the dominate caste person adjudicates, belong so to say to the mundane world, the world of affairs. The attitude seems rather similar to the maker of the image of a deity, who worships what he has created with his own hands. The image, the image maker argues, is a symbol of the Deity and his worship of the image is also symbolic of his worship of the Deity. In the same way the Kshatriya in the past, even when he appointed a person Brahman to a higher status, as did King Ballalsen of Bengal, nevertheless paid homage to the symbol, which he had created or raised, the symbol of a principle which for the present let us call Brahmanhood. The attitude of the other castes was also similar. There is no contradiction in this and we shall discuss it in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

Summing up, the dominant castes are not homogenous with respect to their customs, organization and beliefs. They, however, attach themselves to the ancient Kshatriyas of Indian history, mythology and sacral literature in order to gain prestige and further validate their position. This reference to their Kshatriya origin serves to link them up further with the Brahmins, who are vehicles of this literature. Their high caste status is not only due to their observance of Brahmanical ritual, which they often do not observe, in contrast to the inferior Banias, who do. It is also determined by their possession of secular power. Their relations to the Brahmins is one both of co-operation and of conflict and rivalry, thus presenting two models of behaviour before society. This ambivalent relation between the Brahmins and the dominant caste is a structural feature, it seems, of Hindu society. Nevertheless the dominant caste formally acknowledges the caste superiority of the Brahmins, and by doing so sets an example to even those, who try to imitate him. In doing so he supports a theory which in turn gives him his own high caste status and justifies it.

The support given to the caste supremacy of the Brahmins by the formal acknowledgment of this idea by the dominant castes of each locality further strengthens the public belief in this idea. In the next chapter we shall try to examine in more detail why the Brahman is unanimously accorded supremacy in the caste hierarchy, at least formally.

THE STATUS OF THE BRAHMANS

BEFORE EXAMINING in more detail the position of the Brahmans, let us classify some of their main occupations.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE BRAHMAN CASTE

(1) There is the domestic priest. People, who can afford to keep one, do so to have him officiate at the household shrine. Those, who cannot afford it, call him in on special ceremonial occasions. He is called the 'purohit.' His rank varies with the castes he serves. Blunt's material¹* gives an idea of the relations of various castes and tribes to Brahmans in the Northern states. The picture holds true with variations, of course, for other parts of India also.² In Northern India according to this, out of a total Hindu population of 35½ millions, some 19¼ millions are served by Brahmans of high standing. This 19¼ million includes, high and clean castes like (a) castes that claim Brahmanical descent (e.g. Bhuinhar and Taga), (b) all Rajputs, Khatri and Kayasths who claim Kshatriya descent, (c) all castes generally known as Vaisya, (d) all the clean agricultural castes, (e) a few occupational castes connected with the food trade (e.g. Halwai and Kahar).

(2) There is a second group of 6¾ millions who are served 'either by Brahmans of definitely low standing, or by Brahmans belonging to higher grades, who are, however, despised for the service they render to such castes. Of these, 4¾ millions are occupational or servant castes, of which the most important are the Barhai, Lohar, Bharbhunja, Kori, Gadariya and Kewat. The rest are tribal castes of (what Blunt calls) Dravidian extraction (see footnote below), the Bhar, the Arakh, the Pasi and the Dosadh are the most important of these.

(3) The next group of 8¾ millions includes 25 castes that have

¹ Blunt, op. cit. pp. 299-300.

* I quote here from Blunt who uses Dravidian as a racial category which in my opinion is not correct.

² Thurston, op. cit. Vol. 15, *Nambudiri Brahmans of Malabar* pp. 164-166 & A. K. Iyer, *Mysore Tribes and Castes*, Vol. II, p. 521.

induced Brahmans, necessarily of low standing, to render them some sort of trivial service. The most important of these are Chamars, Kumbhars, Dhobis, Luniyas, Bhangis, Mallahs, Khatiks and Dhanuks. The forms of assistance which the Brahman usually renders to his humble clients is to fix auspicious dates for their important ceremonies, such as marriage; to receive gifts on suitable occasions; sometimes to carry out the worship of one of the more important gods; or to honour weddings by his presence, though taking no part in them....." (ibid p. 300).

(4). "The last is a small group of half a million persons and thirty castes, all of them of non-Aryan extraction. They fall into seven groups: I shall cite Blunt's data at some length to give an example of the ramifications of the Brahman caste. (a) Six tribal castes, all akin to Central Indian tribes; they are the Agariya, Badi Nat, Majhwar, Panka, Parahiya, and Patari. So far they have evinced little or no desire to have any dealings with Brahmans; they have, indeed, priests of their own, called 'baigas'.

(b) Five tribal castes, akin to the Mundari tribes of Chota Nagpur, namely the Dhangar, Khairwa, Kol, Korwa and Saha-riya. They are in much the same case as the tribes of the previous group; though a few of the more advanced Kols are beginning to call in Brahmans of an inferior kind to eat sacrificial food in their houses, paying them to do so.

(c) A third group consists of four tribes belonging to the Dom race- the Dom of the plains, the Dharkar, Basor, and Balahar. These are all the lowest of the low, and no Brahman would ordinarily serve them; though they have sometimes induced them to do so.

(d) The fourth group consists of various gypsy tribes, the Sansiya, Bajaniya Nat, the Bawariya, Bajgi, Bengali and Habura. The last-named occasionally give Brahmans some uncooked grain at their funeral ceremonies; but that seems to constitute their sole dealings with them.

(e) The fifth group consists of related tribes, the Bhuiyar and the greater part of the Musahars. A very few of the last named, who have settled down to village life, consult Brahmans as astrologers. But the group generally will have none of their ministrations, preferring their own 'baigas'; whilst the Bhuiyar

caste, which like the Patani, provides many of these aboriginal priests, affects to despise them, and even relates a ribald legend of them.

(f) The next group consists of the Beldar and Kharot castes which belong to the same family as the Luniyas, Orhs and Binds. The last two castes have risen in the social scale sufficiently to receive the services of the Brahmans of low degree: and no doubt their relatives will do so too in time.

(g) The last group consists of three hill or submontane tribes—the Hill Dom, the Raji, and the Tharu. The last named has occasionally made attempts to secure the ministrations of Brahmans, but so far with very little success.³

The above picture gives a fair idea of the range of relations which exists between Brahmans and various castes and tribes. It is interesting to note the attempts to get the services of a Brahman on the part of a number of them like the Tharus.

We next come to the temple priest. In the Deccan there are some non-Brahman priests, for instance, in the village temples or stones representing Hanuman. The Brahman temple priests also minister to the needs of millions of people. In rank they are below the 'purohīts' of the upper castes. Lower down the scale are the funeral priests. There is an ambivalent attitude towards them because, although respected as priests, they are also treated with aversion because of their association with corpses and with a certain contempt. Then there are astrologer Brahmans, cooks, pilgrim priests. Large numbers again are in trade, the professions, landholding and some even, against prohibition, in agriculture. The number of their sub-castes is legion. In the N.W. provinces Nesfield names 40 in his 'Brief Review of the Caste system' (pp. 49, 115). According to Enthoven the 1,500,000 Brahmans of Bombay province are divided into more than 200 groups between whom marriage is forbidden.⁴ What ultimately gives the Brahman his status is the fact that he is born a Brahman. The respect for the pandit is much greater than that shown to a Brahman cook, nevertheless the latter remains a special person, towards whom an ambivalent attitude of 'taboo' and contempt or derision is

³ Blunt, *ibid.*, pp. 300-302.

⁴ Census of India, Vol. IX. p. 278.

expressed. People again acknowledge the difference between Brahman deals and practices. 'He defrauds even the Gods' is a common proverb. Nevertheless in spite of all the variety of occupations which he has, in spite of hostility, criticism and derision directed at him for his departures from his avowed professions, he does remain a special figure. The lowly cook, whom one shouts at during dinner time, is accorded the top place in the caste pyramid. This is the phenomena which one should attempt to explain at least partially.

A broad classification of the Brahmans may be made along these lines.

(a) The 5 Dravidas, south of the Vindhya range :

- (1) The Maharashtras of Maharashtra.
- (2) The Andhras of the Andhra country.
- (3) The Dravidas of Tamilnad.
- (4) The Karnatas of Karnatak.
- (5) The Gurjaras of Gujarat.

(b) The 5 Gauras, North of the Vindhyan range :

- (1) The Saraswats from the country watered by the river Saraswati.
- (2) The Kanyakubjas from the Kanauj country.
- (3) The Gauras from the country of the lower Ganges.
- (4) The Utkalas of Orissa or Utkala.
- (5) The Maithilas of Mithila, North-east Bihar.

These are, however, broad classifications. For instance, the Brahmans of Bengal are again divided into 5 main sub-castes—Rarhi, Barendra, Vaidik, Saptasati and Madhyasreni. In the Punjab according to Rose⁵ the mass of the Brahmans are Sarsuts or Saraswats, but Gaurs are found in the eastern districts. There are some other groups also. Rose says that the Sarsuts minister to all clean Hindu castes, and possibly some not so clean and their sub-caste rank is based on this fact. There is, for instance, these sub-groups :

- (1) the Shuklas who minister to the Brahmans,
- (2) the Brahmans of the Khatri caste with these further groups
 - (a) Panch-zati, (b) Che-zati, (c) Bunjahis, (d) Asthbans,
 - (e) Khokharan, (f) Sarin,

⁵ Rose, *Caste and Tribes of the Punjab*, Vol. 2, p. 116 seq.

- (3) Brahmans of Aroras,
- (4) Brahmans of Jats,
- (5) Brahmans of inferior castes.

The Brahmans of the Kangra area claim to be Sarsuts but, are not so accepted by the 'real' Sarsuts. Among them we find the following groups:—

- (1) Nagarkotia, divided in turn into 13 functional sub-groups,
- (2) Batehru, who are divided into 2 groups, each again into 9 and 15 sections respectively,
- (3) The Halbaha have 29 gotras.

These facts will give some idea of the ramifications of the local Brahman castes. In Gujarat, the Gurjar Brahmans consist of not less than 93 endogamous divisions. The Brahmans, as we have seen in Chapter 3, do not form a homogenous racial group. Their rites and other practices, as we shall see, later also vary widely. The extreme sub-division that exists among them is a fact that we should bear in mind, when examining the question of the Brahmans.

THE HIGH CASTE POSITION OF THE BRAHMANS

In examining the relationships between caste status and numerical size, political and economical status, and racial characteristics, one can explain the relatively high ritual status of the military and trading castes, as we have tried to do in previous chapters. But one cannot so explain the high caste status of the Brahman. First, he is not generally numerically dominant. Nor has he often much political or economical power. Racially he is not different e.g. in the U.P. and Gujarat, from the other higher castes. What then is associated with his high status, his peak position in the ritual?

According to Marriot, two theories have been advanced to explain caste ranking.⁶ The first he names the 'attributional theory'. This theory says that caste rank is determined by its behaviour or attributes. A caste is considered high, if its characteristic way of life is judged high and pure, and vice versa. This is more or less Stevenson's contention. We have tried to show that it does

⁶ Marriot, *Man in India* Apr.-June 1959, pp. 92 seq.

not fit all the facts, that 'pure' behaviour has not raised low castes, and vice versa. Marriot makes the same criticism. He points out also that, though some castes are sometimes ranked with precision, there is no precise evaluation of the degree of pollution in various occupations. Is cutting hair more or less polluting than washing clothes?

As against the attributional theory Marriot favours what he terms the 'interactional theory'. This explains caste ranking as due to the ritual interaction of two things, the giving and receiving (a) of various kinds of food and (b) of ritual services. This in turn is ultimately linked to the power relations of society. Thus he says, "A caste of persons, who eat goat meat and chicken, drink liquor, and engage in hunting, may be assigned, without change in any of these customs, either to a very low or to a very high caste rank. Choice in the assignment depends on how much ritual honour and deference the caste can command, while this in turn usually depends on the amount of land or other wealth, which the caste possesses, or on the services which it offers for hire" (op. cit. p. 100). Further, "Money and land do not directly affect caste standing".⁷ For this explanation, as we have seen, there is a certain amount of evidence (c.f. Chs. 1 & 4). Nevertheless he faces facts, which we have cited before, like the high caste position of poor Brahmans, devoid of political power, and the low caste position of some affluent Untouchables. It may be, he suggests, that the 'attributional' theory works in their case. He nevertheless feels that 'interactional analysis' can give "a more complete understanding of the Brahman and untouchable castes as well".⁸ Finally he suggests that there is the "possibility that what I have called 'attributional' and 'interactional' and attempted to discuss as two opposite types, may be understood better as two aspects of the same thing".⁹ It is, of course, generally not desirable to put forward too many theories to explain any phenomena, natural or social. Hence the multiplication of explanations 'attributional'. 'interactional' may not be very helpful. But there also seems to be a good case for supporting his last suggestion that what he calls 'attributional' and 'interactional' are two aspects of the same thing. Marriot actually suggests that one side is 'social structure'

⁷ Op. cit. p. 99.

⁸ Op. cit. p. 103.

⁹ Op. cit. p. 106.

and the other is 'culture'.¹⁰ If we substitute the word 'culture' because of its varied usage by the more precise term 'system of beliefs and ideas,' the linkage between the two may be more clearly understood, as we shall try to show below. Obviously, to say that the Brahman is high caste because his behaviour is 'high' is unsatisfactory. It is not an explanation, and as we have seen that there are many castes as 'pure' or 'high' in their behaviour as the Brahman, who are at the same time lower than he is, sometimes very low. An 'attributional' explanation by itself seems unsatisfactory.

What then determines the Brahman's high caste status, his peak position in the ritual hierarchy?

We suggest three possible answers :

(1) The Brahman occupies the position, that he does, because he symbolises in his person the highest ideals of caste Hindu society. This includes his position as a priest, as an intermediary between God and man. Every society can be said to have associated with it a system of beliefs and ideals. This would be a part of its total functioning. The phrase 'Hindu system of beliefs and ideals' requires elucidation and qualifications, as it embraces a complex of systems. This we shall do in this chapter.

Conversely, the Untouchables have been regarded as representing all that is a negation of these ideals. Below we shall take at random one of the ideals of caste Hindus (particularly in Northern India)—the desirability of child marriage and illustrate the dichotomy with respect to this ideal between Caste Hindus and scheduled Castes and scheduled Tribes.

We must, of course, qualify the above proposition by saying that it must be viewed particularly in a local or regional light. The Brahman embodies the highest ideals of the regional or local society; and the local untouchables, conversely, as their negation. The position of the Brahman in a caste hierarchy is always a position in a regional or local caste system and the role that he plays is consequently primarily a regional or local role. We shall have occasion to discuss this later.

(2) A second possible factor responsible for the Brahman's high status may be the fact that as a priest he performs a valu-

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 106.

able function, as an intermediary between man and God. There is a Hindu saying, expressed in the form of a syllogism, that the whole world is subject to the gods, the gods are subject to the 'mantras' (incantation), the 'mantras' are subject to the Brahmins, and therefore the Brahmins are our gods. O'Malley says "it is not even necessary that the Brahmin should understand the meaning of the words he utters. Some indeed are ignorant of their meaning, and those, who hear them, are equally in the dark, for they are in a dead language. They are, however, essential for the due performance of domestic rites, and their mere utterance is efficacious in averting evil influences. It is probably this belief in their mysterious powers as spell binders, added to the force of custom and tradition, that accounts for the continual reverence of the peasants for the Brahmins.

"They believe that it is good to be blessed and terrible to be cursed by Brahmins. They are assured that to give them presents and to entertain and feed them are acts of merits, while the payment of fees to them for the performance of ceremonies is obligatory. They give them the outward reverence which is their birthright, e.g. by respectful salutations on meeting them. According to one saying, "a Brahmin must be honoured even though he has neither virtue nor merit."^{10a} The people do not always respect them. They deride them. Some of their feelings are expressed in proverbs like "There are three bloodsuckers in this world, the flea, the bug and the Brahmin" or a "Brahmin must have his cakes even if your children starve". "But even, however, while they jibe and jeer," writes O'Malley, "the people feel that they are indispensable from the religious point of view. Personal unworthiness does not impair the value of their ministrations. They hold the key to sacred mysteries and it makes no difference that those who hold it are wanting in moral virtue—a view which has a parallel in the twenty-sixth of the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, which sets forth that the sacraments are effectual even though they be ministered by evil men".¹¹ The priest and the magician, it is well-known, is generally held to be indispensable in all kinds of pre-literate societies also. Hence this attitude of people to their own particular priests should not surprise us.

^{10a} O'Malley, *Popular Hinduism*, p. 190, Cambridge, 1931.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 181.

(3) A third possible factor would be the peculiarly 'sacral' (in the sense of a taboo against something which is too holy) character which the Brahman bears to non-Brahmins. The Brahman should not be defiled in any way. Taboos are widespread among preliterate peoples. Notes and Queries defines a taboo as "a prohibition resisting on some magico—religious sanction, infringement of which brings punishment automatically (p. 185). In this sense the Brahman is also a tabooed object. Polluting him is an act which will bring dire consequences. Untouchables have been known to implore Brahmins to keep away from them. As for murdering a Brahman, O'Malley says, "The person of a Brahman is so sacred that the murder of one is a deadly sin." (ibid p. 191). Two types of objects then, it seems, must not be touched—the too holy or pure and the unclean and the impure.

It seems that because of such religious reactions of people to sacred objects and hence by transference to priests, who deal with sacred objects, (aided no doubt by Brahmanical propaganda), the Brahman has become a 'tabooed' object himself. Hutton discusses those notions of pollution and taboo in his book "Caste in India" and even goes so far as to say, "The Brahmanic codes have insisted that every community should obey its own rules. Flat insistence took place first at a stage in social evolution at which law consisted, largely at any rate, of a code of taboos".¹²

If now we class these three factors together—Brahman ideals as the highest ideals and the Brahman as their physical embodiment—the supernatural capacities attributed to Brahmins—and their peculiar 'sacral' nature, we can sum up by saying that the high caste status of the Brahman is due to the system of beliefs and ideals of the Hindu. On the surface this sounds like saying that a caste is high because people think it is high, or that the Brahman is the highest caste because people think Brahmins are the purest. But if one looks a little deeper one can see sense in the above summary. A society has a system of beliefs and ideals which is related to its functioning. Anthropologists have to find out how it is related. The functioning of the social structure of Hindu society has one of its aspects these beliefs and ideals. These beliefs and ideals in their turn serve to support, uphold and elevate the Brahman caste. If the social structure of Hindu society

¹² Op cit. p. 189.

were different, there would be no Brahman caste, because there would have been a variation in its system of beliefs and ideals, a difference which might not have supported or elevated a group like the Brahmans. The phenomenon, perhaps, can be compared to a feedback system in a machine. The functioning social structure has as its concomitant a system or systems of beliefs and ideals. These in their turn generate a force of their own in the growth or the functioning of the structure. This appears to be a likely explanation for the high ritual status of the Brahman, which can be correlated neither to numerical size, race, wealth or political power. Broadly speaking their peculiar position seems to have arisen from the needs of society.

Another explanation of the Brahman's high position is sometimes given. This is that the political authority in Hindu society has made him what he is; has in other words forced people to accept him as the highest. We have discussed some aspects of this question in the last chapter. The scriptural writings are undoubtedly full of exhortations to the king and to the political authority in general to defend the Brahman and the cow. The scriptures were, of course, written by Brahmans, but nevertheless the secular power has in general upheld and defended Brahmans. But it has in addition created Brahmans and executed them also, as for instance, W. H. Tone, an officer, in the Maratha service noted. "I have known them (Brahmans) frequently punished very severely as delinquents, some even put to death by order of the prince".¹¹ We deal, however, not with exceptions primarily, but with that which is general, for in complex social phenomena one should not be surprised by exceptions. Nevertheless, it is one thing to punish persons for injuring Brahmans, it is quite another thing to instil the belief in them that they are the highest caste, so to say, 'gods on earth'. We have seen before that the dominant caste, by formally accepting the caste superiority of the Brahmans, gives powerful weight to the idea that the Brahman is the highest and the most ideal of castes.

The Tharus, a lowly tribe in the U.P., for instance, desire the services of a Brahman. They are refused. What secular power is forcing them to ask for the services of the Brahman, which the Brahman then refuses? Later on, we shall quote instances of low

¹¹ Quoted by O'Malley in *Popular Hinduism*, p. 192.

castes adopting Brahmanical ways which are certainly spontaneous. One may repeat: the high and peculiar position of the Brahman seems to have arisen, broadly speaking, out of the needs of society.

One may stop here, of course. It is interesting, however, to see what evidence exists for the first proposition, what illustration can be given of the tendency to regard the Brahman as the symbol of the highest ideals of Hindu society. Any such positive illustration must face these four possible questions :—

- (1) whether there are clear differences in the systems of beliefs and ideas held by different castes in Hindu society,
- (2) whether the low castes tend to look up to, to emulate the upper caste systems,
- (3) if so, why have they not all adopted upper caste practices by this time,
- (4) whether there is a minimum number of beliefs and ideals common to all the regions of Hindu India; and the role that they play in the structure of Hindu society, their relation to the social structure.

In dealing with the plurality of beliefs and ideals and the search for certain common all-India beliefs and ideals, we are not going to launch into an extensive investigation on their role in society but will content ourselves with the propositions:—

- (1) that social systems have associated with them certain systems of belief, thought and ideals;
- (2) these systems have a function in the over-all operation of society.

We shall also assume that customs and practices in the last analysis have ideas, beliefs and ideals associated with them. We may also use the word 'idea systems' to describe them. At the present level of development of social anthropology the problem of a common denominator for such idea systems has not yet been satisfactorily solved (c.f. 'Anthropology Today' op. cit. 'Values'). The phenomena to be studied is complex, it varies continually and is full of subtle shades of differences of quality. To attempt an overall description of the idea system obtaining in different parts of society is difficult, even if the related data together with all the

nuances are available. The difficulty lies not only in the insufficiency of information, in the changes of ideas that are continuously taking place, but also in the fact that the data is not often discrete and measurable. A further difficulty arises from the different standpoints different observers would take in the absence, as mentioned above, of universal categories of measurement. In the circumstances it is best to confine oneself to measuring that which can be measured, where the answer to a question is either a 'yes' or a 'no'. Such phenomena are the questions of child or adult marriage, widow remarriage, divorce, the eating of certain foods and so on. If differences can be shown to exist in such cases, one can point to them as examples of differences in ideals. If anyone so desires he can then trace some of the more basic ideas related to such practices. It is sufficient for our present purpose to show similarities and dissimilarities in certain social practices and ideals. The following Tables on child and adult marriages in this sense give interesting data. The first data concern the situation in Bengal.

Type of marriage	Number of castes and tribes			Percentage of castes and tribes		
	Caste Hindu	Scheduled castes	Scheduled tribes	Caste Hindu	Scheduled castes	Scheduled tribes
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
Child	56	10	2	63	31	7
Adult	7	3	17	8	10	63
Both	26	19	8	29	59	30
Total	89	32	27	100	100	100

(Based on Risley's 'Tribes and Castes of Bengal' in R. K. Mukherji, "The Dynamics of Rural Society", p. 110).

The practice of child marriage by scheduled castes and tribes like several other customs imbibed by them is the result of their acculturation with the caste Hindus.

These extracts from Risley are evidence of attempts at 'Sanskritization,' but 41 years later so far as the scheduled groups are concerned, their social position does not seem to have materially changed.

The same differences of behaviour can be seen in the case of the Uttar Pradesh also. The highest castes in this province generally have their daughters married very young. The castes which had a custom, which was the diametrical opposite of this practice, were all very low castes according to the Census of 1911. A comparison of the survey of 1895 made by Crooke and that of 1911 reveals a tendency which is repeated in many other places. Low castes have lowered the marriage of their daughters in the hope of raising their social status. Such processes have been given the name of Sanskritization. It is probable that the number of low castes which practised adult marriage for their women becomes greater the more we go back in time. At any rate like the Bengal Table it shows the contrast between some of the ideals of the high castes and the low castes with respect to adult marriage.

Changes in the direction of child marriage between 1895 (Mr Crooke's survey) and the 1911 survey

	<i>Girls</i>		<i>Boys</i>	
	1895	1911	1895	1911
Ahariya (M)	7 — 10	5 — 9		
Bargahi (VL)	adult	7 — 11		
Bari (VL)	12 — 13	10	12	10 — 12
Halivar	9 — 10	5 — 12		
Khatik (VL)	8 — 10	3 — 15		
Kanjar (VL)	7 — 8	6 — 8	10 — 12	9 — 10

(M = middle caste; VL = very low).

(Ref. Blunt, pp. 77-79).

Of the 6 castes, who have lowered the marriage age of their girls, 4 are of very low status. The Table shows their desire to raise their social status by adopting the ways of the high castes.

Certain customs exist at the top of the hierarchy and certain others exist at the bottom. This we have seen with respect to child marriage. But these values cannot be seen as constituting two self-contained systems. For the following data show that the low castes are increasingly tending to change their behaviour and to adopt the ways and beliefs of the high castes. To the extent that they do so, they tacitly admit the superiority of the beliefs of the high castes. But they may thus tend to have two contending

sets of beliefs and ideals, as the Boad outcastes of Bisipara demonstrated, when one section favoured adopting the values of the higher castes and the other section did not. The picture is not a simple one.

Here are some examples of lower castes changing their customs and adopting those of higher castes. The data are taken from the Census of India 1951.¹⁴ The data cover Bengal and Bihar.

1. Bagdi — A cultivating fishing and menial caste of Western and Central Bengal. Appears to be aboriginal and Dravidian in descent.... Further east the Bagdis are more Hinduised. In Bankura, Manbhum and parts of Orissa adult marriage is frequent, which is rare in the east. In marriage the rituals are to a large extent borrowed from Hindu custom, 'Sindurdan' being considered the most important item in the more aboriginal sections. 'Sanga' marriage of widows is allowed in most places. Divorce is not allowed in the more Hinduised sections. The Bagdis are served by degraded Brahmans..... The social status is very low.

2. Bauri — A caste of Western Bengal and Bihar of non-Aryan descent. Traces of Totemism survive in many places. As with Bagdis the eastern groups are more Hinduised and employ 'patit' (fallen) Brahmanas. In Bankura, however, they employ their own priest.... Both infant and adult marriage are prevalent. The marriage customs are much the same as with Bagdis. Divorce and widow remarriage are allowed... Social status is the same as that of Haris and Ghasis.

3. Beldar — Status same as Nunias and Bauris, employ Brahmans.

4. Bhuinmali — A menial caste.... considered to be the same as Haris.... Gait notes that probably Haris, who have given up scavenging and taken to more respectable occupations, prefer the designation of Bhuinmali. In some places Bhuinmalis have given up pork. It is only in the last century that they first declined to eat with the Chandals.

5. Bhuiya — The name refers to a large number of groups distributed all over Northern India, many of them being parts of Hindu orthodox society. Those in Hazaribagh and Santal Par-

¹⁴The Tribes and castes of West Bengal, Glossary A, Scheduled Castes, pp. 70-76.

ganas are considerably Hinduised and the more well to do among them describe themselves as Ghatvals and claim Rajput descent. In Orissa a large section took up military occupations and became merged in the Khandaits. In Bihar on the other hand, the Bhuiyas came under the domination of the Hindus as rat-eaters (Musahars) and they took rank among the low castes of Bihar.

6. *Bhuimiy* — A non-Aryan tribe of Manbhum, Singhbhum and Western Bengal. They are closely allied to, if not identical with the Mundas. According to Risley they are Hinduised Mundas, who have severed their connection with the parent tribe. Adult marriage still is the rule though among the higher classes of the tribe, the zamindars and landlords; infant marriage is gaining ground. Widow marriage is freely permitted by the Sanga ritual. Divorced wives may marry again by Sanga rites. The higher classes follow the Hindu religion, while the mass worship Singbonga, Dharm and a host of minor gods... The higher classes employ Brahmans while the mass are served by their own priests, the 'Layas'. The landlord class claim to be Rajputs, while the main rank below the Kurmi but above the Bauris, Bagdis etc.

7. *Bind* — a non-Aryan caste. Adult marriage is prevalent but infant marriage is considered more respectable. Widows remarry by the 'sagai' form. The Hindu gods are revered so also are Bandi, Sakha, Gorai, Bhuia, Panch Pir. They are considered impure in many areas.

8. *Sunri* — Infant marriage is practised while widow remarriage and divorce are strictly prohibited. Sunris are served by degraded Brahmans. In spite of their high economic position the caste has a very low status. The Dhobas and Napits are recruited from the Sunri caste.

9. *Turi* — a non-Aryan caste. They are a Hinduised offshoot of Mundas (Risley). Adult marriage is the rule. Widow marriage in 'sagai' form is allowed, preferably to the younger brother of the deceased husband. Divorce is also allowed and the divorced women may remarry. They are being rapidly Hinduised and many now belong to the Siva Narayan sect. But Barendra Bhut and Bura Buri are held in special reverence. Except the Siva Narayanis, Turis are lax in matters of food, beef and pork being eaten by most others.

The cases cited above refer to the very low caste Hindus. It is interesting to note that prior to attempts to bring in child marriage and to prohibit divorce and widow remarriage amongst them, the vast majority practised adult marriage, had divorce and the remarriage of widows and divorcees. If one remembers the fact that upper caste Hindus allow none of these, the contrast can hardly be sharper. Though such detailed information regarding diet is not available, the contrast here with respect to what is available is also very sharp. One can also note the growing use of Brahmans as priests, even though degraded ones, and the increased worship of what Marriot calls the gods of the Great Tradition.

The foregoing examples provide a fairly vivid picture of the contrast of values between the two "ends" of society and the attempts of the lower 'end' to adopt the practices of the upper. What is also remarkable is the widespread nature of the attempts to do so.

Another example of this movement of lower castes comes from Mysore: "Two legal fictions" seem to have helped the spread of Sanskritization among the low castes. Firstly, the ban against the non-twice-born castes performing Vedic ritual was circumvented by restricting the ban only to the chanting of mantras from the Vedas. That is, the ritual acts were separated from the accompanying mantras and this separation facilitated the spread of Brahmanised ritual among all the Castes of Hindus, frequently including Untouchables. Thus several Vedic rites, including the rite of the gift of the virgin (kanyadan), are performed at the marriage of many non-Brahmanical castes in Mysore state. And secondly, a Brahman priest officiates at these weddings. He does not chant Vedic mantras, however, but instead, the mangalastaka stotras which are post-Vedic verses in Sanskrit. The substitution of these verses for Vedic mantras is the second 'legal fiction'.¹⁵

The non-Brahmanical castes adopt not only Brahmanical ritual, but also certain Brahmanical institutions and values. Until recently, Brahmans used to marry their girls before puberty, and parents, who had not succeeded in finding husbands for daughters past the age of puberty, were regarded as guilty of a great sin. Brahman marriage is in theory indissoluble, and a Brahman widow, even if she be a child widow, is required to shave her head, shed all

¹⁵ Srinivas, *Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. XV No. 4, August, 1956.

jewellery and ostentation in clothes. Among Hindus generally, there is a preference for virginity in brides, chastity in wives, and continence in widows, and this is specially marked among the highest castes.

The institutions of the "low" castes are more liberal in the spheres of marriage and sex than those of the Brahmans. Post-puberty marriages do occur among them, widows do not have to shave their heads, and divorce and widow marriage are both permitted and practiced. In general, their sex code is not as harsh towards women as that of the top castes, especially Brahmans. But as a caste rises in the hierarchy and its ways become more Sanskritized, it adopts the sex and marriage code of the Brahmans. Sanskritization results in harshness towards women. Examples taken from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Mysore illustrate clearly that (a) there is a difference in the systems of beliefs and ideals held by the upper castes and by those at the bottom of the caste system and (b) how the lower groups try to adopt the practices of the upper castes.

The high castes look down on the beliefs, practices and ideals of the low castes. The low castes react in two ways (a) by sticking closer to what is their own (cf. Blunt's account at the beginning of this chapter of low castes and tribes who refuse to have a Brahman priest), (b) by imitating the high castes in order to rise in the social hierarchy in order to attain ritual equality with them. The high castes on the one hand welcome the tendency not to eat beef and to marry their daughters young, but resent the low caste's uppishness in adopting certain high caste ways as wearing the sacred thread, changing their names, titles and dress. Cohn reports how in the village of Madhopur in the U.P. the Rajputs beat up a low caste Noniya for wearing the sacred thread. The low castes think that their low ritual status is due to their present practices, which are regarded as low by the upper castes. Change them and they will be given greater ritual equality with the upper caste is the argument of a section amongst them. This is how some of the Untouchables of the Orissan village of Bisipara argued.

Some of the high castes again will absorb or adopt some of the beliefs and practices of the low castes, as for instance, the worship of certain deities, eating certain flesh foods, changing certain marriage customs.

These are some of the aspects of the process of interaction that goes on in caste Hindu society. It may be argued that if a society has to continue as a society this process of interaction must go on in the sphere of its ideas and customs, otherwise it would split apart. This means that, if it has to continue as a society, it must accept a certain minimum of common ideas, beliefs and ideals. When this common area shrinks, social tension would increase to the breaking point. But sooner or later, unless it is physically possible to partition a society, one set or another of the conflicting idea systems or a compromise between them must prevail in order, as functional anthropologists put it, that society might continue to function. This might explain the tendency described as 'Sanskritisation' by Srinivas and others as well as its opposite tendency. When the upper castes meet with very different customs among the lower castes two factors may influence them to adopt some of the practices of the latter. The first may be termed 'psychological' in the sense that they imbibe something of the culture with which they come into contact. The second factor would be a consideration of the fact that, if they have to retain influence over the lower castes, they cannot show themselves to be entirely alien to their beliefs and ideas. Such an uncompromising attitude would in turn result in the lower castes taking a similar uncompromising attitude to the former's beliefs and ideas. Uncompromising attitudes at both "ends" of society would hinder social co-operation. It seems that the Brahmans are particularly plastic in their practices in this respect, perhaps, as we have seen in Blunt's list of their clients (above) in the Northern Provinces, because they serve such a variety of clients with different customs. It is generally held that a good part of the Brahmans of South India and Maharashtra came from North India. Nevertheless in these areas they practice matrilinear cross-cousin marriages, marriages between uncles and nieces, which the Northern Brahmans disallow. If some of them had come from the north, the main explanation of this change would be a desire to keep in line with the customs and beliefs of the local populations.

A similar explanation may be given of the non-vegetarian habits of Kashmiri and Bengali Brahmans. In the U.P. village of Kisan Garhi the Brahmans not only do the 'puja' for four non-Brahmanical little godlings, but are most assiduous in upholding their

worship. Marriot points out that 45% only of the gods, whom the Kisan Garhi Brahmans worship, are Sanskritic.¹⁶

With respect to the tendency among the lower castes to imitate the upper castes we may ask: was there more tension in former times than now, when they had adopted less of these ideas and customs? Or we may ask why by this time had they not 'Sanskritized' themselves completely? With respect to the first question we may say that a certain tension probably exists in all societies in varying degrees. With respect to the second we can briefly state here that the lower castes were both encouraged to imitate certain upper caste practices, while being discouraged with respect to some others. The contemporary situation is somewhat different from the past in that a breakdown of the old structure has to some extent taken place, leading to more widespread attempts at imitation of the upper castes. This is what we shall discuss a few pages later.

THE TERM "SANSKRITIZATION"

I have hitherto tried to avoid the use of the term 'Sanskritization' since its utility is at present widely debated by Indian anthropologists (e.g. see the discussion in 'Society in India'). But since the term has been widely used to describe the phenomena shown above it may be desirable to discuss it here. Srinivas uses the term 'Sanskritization' to describe the two-way process of cultural interchange that goes on between the higher and the lower castes:

"I have been asked by more than one student of Indian anthropology whether I regard Sanskritization as only a one-way process, and whether the local culture is always a recipient. The answer is clear; it is a two-way process though the local cultures seem to have received more than they have given."¹⁷ Srinivas realises the limitations involved in the use of the term and advocates that it should be abandoned if it is not found to be useful. "The moment it is discovered that the term is more a hindrance than a help in analysis, it should be disregarded quickly and without regret" (*ibid*).

¹⁶ *Village India*, p. 209.

¹⁷ *Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 4, 1956.

The term, however, seems to have come to stay at least for the present. I shall use it to denote the adoption of higher caste values which have associations with Sanskritic literature. For I believe that the 'downward' borrowing by upper castes cannot be seen as Sanskritization. Since the new behaviour has nothing to do with Sanskritic traditions or literature. This, of course, is a major weakness of the term; and the substitution of 'acculturation' has been suggested so that all kinds of borrowing can be included. But this latter term also has its drawbacks, largely connected with the difficulty of transposing a caste's customs into its 'culture', which seems too broad a term for these.

Srinivas himself lays more stress on upward than downward adoption, as this quotation shows. He says that "Sanskritization" means not only the adoption of new customs and habits, but also exposure to new ideas and values which have found frequent expression in the vast body of Sanskrit literature, sacred as well as secular. Karma, Dharma, Papa, Punya, Maya, Samsara and Moksha are example of some of the most common Sanskritic philosophical ideas, and when a people become Sanskritized these words occur frequently in their talk. These ideas reach the common people through Sanskrit myths and stories" (ibid). The data derived over the period of about the last 60 years show a widespread tendency to adopt upper caste beliefs and practices by low castes. It may, however, be argued that it is not the Brahman's ideals which are emulated so much as those of the dominant caste. We have quoted the example that in the 1931 census in the U.P., Rajasthan and Central India 70% of the claims by low castes for a high caste title were for Rajput titles (cf. pp. 141-143). The corresponding claim for Brahman titles was about 30%. The Rajput ideals may immediately appear the more desirable to many lower castes. The situation in Hindu society, however, is such, as we have seen in the last chapter, that the upper castes in particular, theoretically, at least, elevate the Brahman above them. If one becomes a Rajput, so to say, one has then to regard the Brahman theoretically at least as one's superior. This is a social norm. It exists among castes other than high castes also. As against it the opposite attitude—to lower the Brahman and deride him—also exists. But assessing the whole situation the tendency to regard the Brahman as supreme in Hindu society is the stronger. For

society as a whole does place the Brahman at the top of the caste pyramid. The low caste person may desire to be a Rajput, but in order to remain a Rajput he will have to acknowledge the Brahman's supremacy. This may be regarded as fact which exists irrespective of his psychology or immediate aims.

WHY HAVE NOT ALL CASTES BECOME SANSKRITIZED BY NOW?

We can now consider the third of the questions posed above: If lower castes tend to adopt upper caste ideas and practices, or 'Sanskritize' themselves why have they not become Sanskritized by now?

Ibbetson says this process is not new, "... the classification being hereditary, it is next to impossible for the individual himself to rise; it is the tribe or section of the tribe that alone can improve its position, and this it can do only after the lapse of several generations, during which time it must abandon a lower for a higher occupation, conform more strictly with the arbitrary rules, affect social exclusiveness or special sanctity, or separate itself after some similar fashion from the body of the caste to which it belongs"... "in Indian society the movement upwards is far slower and more difficult than in other societies."¹⁸ Blunt says the same thing after a comprehensive analysis of the caste system in Northern India. He writes referring to his book 'The Caste System of Northern India' that his book is not an attempt to revise Crooke's great work 'The Tribes and Castes of the N.W.P. and Oudh.' "None the less it will be useful to devote a chapter to the description of new castes which were not in existence when Mr. Crooke wrote".¹⁹ He points out with examples how the new group separates from the parent stock forming a new caste or perhaps affiliates itself to another caste after separation or becomes a new endogamous sub-caste within the caste.²⁰ This he says went on in the past also.²¹

There does not seem much doubt that the processes described by Ibbetson and Blunt, the adoption of new manners to rise in the social scale, went on in the past. There were, however, two

¹⁸ Ibbetson, *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 172-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Chap. XI, p. 208.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 236.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 237.

restraining forces. The first was the theory of Karma which enjoined each sub-caste or caste members to remain in their station, perform their caste duty and as a result of that, not by violating it, to be born in a higher caste and so on until they were born as Brahmans.

The theory of Karma seems widespread, though how widespread one does not know yet. One effect of it, however, is to point out that the last and supreme birth prior to Moksha, 'liberation', 'union with God', is in the caste of the Brahman. Thus it subtly helps in the idealisation of the Brahman. At the same time it ensures the performance of the separate caste duties which enables society to carry on. The doctrine of Karma encourages the adoption of upper caste practices up to a certain point. But up to a point only. The rest will be achieved in one's next re-births. In this respect it clashes with the present widespread attempts at 'Sanskritization'.

Lewis²² says that only 14 of a survey of 25 men in the village studied, believe in reincarnation. And of these, many believed that Karma operated only within this life—not necessarily through a chain of lives. We have no further data to support this idea of Karma as a belief of a large majority.

The second restraining force was the use of physical force to stop lower castes from going too far in imitating upper castes. We have cited examples from Bisipara in Orissa where Harijans were refused temple entry; from Madhopur in the U.P. where a Moniya was beaten for wearing the sacred thread. Gardner Nurphy in 'The Minds of Men' cites similar examples from the U.P.²³ These can be multiplied. Hutton shows how in December 1930 the Kallar caste in Ramnad in South India "propounded eight prohibitions, the disregard of which led to the use of violence by the Kallar against the exterior castes whose huts were fired, whose granaries and property were destroyed, and whose livestock was looted". Some of the eight prohibitions were as follows:—that the Adi Dravidas should not be allowed to wear ornaments of gold and silver—that their males should not wear coats or shirts or banniyaans, umbrellas or shoes—and that Adi

²² Lewis, *Village life in Northern India*, p. 253.

²³ Op. cit. p. 96.

Dravida women should not wear flowers or use saffron paste. Later on this list was increased to sixteen points.²¹

In a way the present situation is a new one in India. We have discussed in previous chapters how the arrival of the British and post-British administration brought about far-reaching changes in the village economy, structure and ideas. These changes loosened the old caste structure, loosened also the grip of the dominant caste and set in motion new forces, under which new castes began to rise and groupings began to change (Rf. Ch. 6). It is with this background of a weakening of old structure that low caste groups are tending to adopt upper caste ways, with the upper castes less and less able or willing to stop them from doing so. The Rajputs of Madhopur who beat the Noniya, do not evince interest in such attempts by the low castes now, according to Cohn.²² Partly it seems because they themselves have become more interested in taking a Westernised behaviour, and the adoption of Sanskritized ways by lower castes no longer strikes at the basis of their prestige. There is seen today a certain relaxation in the opposition of upper castes to these attempts to Sanskritize themselves on the part of the lower castes which they probably would have resisted in pre-British days.

We come to the last of the questions—Can we find a system of beliefs common to all regions of Hindu society and what is their relation to the social structure, more specifically to their correlation with caste status that we are investigating? We may, for instance, state that the idea of pollution is one such common belief. Another may be the belief in ancestor worship. But I do not think we can as yet formulate them comprehensively. And if we could, the question arises as to how Indian anthropologists should treat them, more particularly how they are related to questions of caste status. In such a study the question of methodology has to be raised — whether beliefs, ideas and ideals should be studied outside the context of the local social structure.

There is no doubt that in the study of Indian anthropology the considerable body of Hindu literature, that exists, has to be studied and related to the social structure. This is one of the angles of attack, so to say, on the problem.

²¹ Hutton, *op. cit.* pp. 178-179.

²² Cohn, *op. cit.* pp. 74, 76.

A number of points have to be made in connection with such studies. The first is that we may approach the anthropology of India either socially or culturally. Nadel says, "Social facts are two-dimensional. Like any two-dimensional entity, they can be projected on to one or the other co-ordinate, and so viewed under one or the other aspect. If we wish to find names also for the dimensions themselves, they seem suggested by the familiar words 'Society' and 'Culture'. Society as I see it means the totality of social facts projected on to the dimensions of relationships and groupings, culture, the same totality in the dimension of action". "Social relations and groupings into which they merge are as much of an abstraction as is culture. Both too are abstractions evolved from the same observational data—individuals in co-activity; but they are not, I think abstractions of the same level".²⁶ Depending on the standpoint from which we examine the phenomena will be the nature of our findings. Describing the method of study of 'Sanskritization' undertaken now, Srinivas says that it has often been done in cultural and not structural terms. Marriot's study of the relations between the 'great' and 'little' traditions have been thus made. As such the material so obtained, however valuable, cannot be directly used in structural studies, but has to be worked over and re-interpreted. Again the situation is not satisfactory unless structural studies are made. Feeling this to be so Srinivas writes: "To describe the social changes occurring in modern India in terms of Sanskritization and Westernization is to describe it primarily in cultural and not structural terms. An analysis in terms of structure is much more difficult than an analysis in terms of culture. The increase in the social space of the Brahmins, and its implications for them and for the caste system as a whole, needs to be studied in detail".²⁷ And he continues:

"One way of breaking down Sanskritization into simpler and more homogenous concepts would be to write a history of Sanskrit culture. Taking care to point out the different values and system subsumed in it and to delineate the regional variations. The task would be a stupendous one even if the period beginning with the British rule was excluded. Such a study is not likely to be forthcoming in the near future and anthropologists would be

²⁶ *Foundations of Social Anthropology*, pp. 29, 30.

²⁷ Srinivas, *Introduction to the Civilization of India*, p. 374.

well advised to continue 'Sanskritization' as they are doing at present; study each field instance of Sanskritization in relation to the locally dominant caste and other factors. The next task would be to compare different instances of Sanskritization in the same culture-area, and the third task would be to extend the scope of comparative studies to include the whole of India".²⁸

Since caste status varies from area to area, and since we are concerned with these local structures, I believe that at present questions of the all-India spread of a belief system should wait until some programme of the kind advocated by Srinivas has been carried out.

The local variation of cultural forms is naturally very relevant to the degree to which a common belief system or great tradition exists in Hindu society. Here the data collected by Marriot are significant.

Srinivas outlines the task. It is a very big one and most of it has not yet been done. That being so, one certainly should be wary of rushing into facile generalisations regarding the rate and extent of 'Sanskritization' or the interaction between the 'Great' and 'Little' Traditions.

Second: the importance of not rushing into such generalisations (regarding 'Sanskritization' or the interactions between the 'Great and Little' Tradition) is borne out by some of the investigations carried out by Marriot.²⁹ He points out that in the Uttar Pradesh village of Kishan Garhi two-thirds of the total list of deities worshipped (about 60 out of 90) have no reference to the gods of the Great Tradition.³⁰ The people of Kisan Garhi worship at least 12 of this 60 whose cult spreads over areas of from several districts to several states [e.g. ('Saint Apparent', "One of Agra", "The Auspicious")]. But about half of the whole collection consists of deities whose names are foreign even to any vernacular literary tradition and whose cults have but little professional elaboration. About 30 of Kisan Garhi's list of 90 recognised deities belong to the list of the great pantheon of whom about 7 or 8

²⁸ Ibid, p. 350.

²⁹ *Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization, Village India*, pp. 170 seq.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 207 seq.

are worshipped. Thus we have the following approximate breakdown:—

Local deities	...	50
Regional „	...	10
Great tradition deities		30

Proceeding further with his analysis Marriot points out that 15 deities can be isolated as within the common core of objects worshipped by members of at least 3 out of the 4 major blocks of caste in Kisan Garhi. The 4 blocks are (1) Brahmans, (2) high castes, (3) low castes, (4) lowest castes. Of these 15, 7 or 8 may be identified as gods of the 'Great Tradition', regional deities make up 4 of this list and local deities another 4. He is of the opinion, however, that "next to the worship of their own respective ancestral spirits of the last two generations, villagers are most attached, I would estimate to the worship of four local godlings of no refinement whatsoever": "Chamar", "Alop", Bhumiya, Pattvari."³¹

Thus in Kisan Garhi in actual practice we find, that after almost 3000 years of 'Sanskritization' in the heart of Brahmarsidesa, 4 local godlings are to the villagers the most significant; and that a great part in fostering the worship of local deities is played by none other than 'Sanskritizing' Brahmans themselves. On the other hand, the worship of the Deities of the Great Pantheon has also to be noted. The same picture is borne out by the festivals which are observed in Kisan Garhi. Marriot found that nearly half the festivals observed in Kisan Garhi not only have connections with Great Traditional Texts, but are themselves observed very widely, if not universally in India. The remaining half of the festivals have more limited regional or local distributions. Among four of them no connections can be traced with the Great Tradition.³²

A number of conclusions emerge from Marriot's account. First in Kisan Garhi the process of imitating and adopting highest caste modes is not to be equalled with the adoption of the norms and values of Sanskritic literature or of "The Great Tradition" only. Valuable as are studies of this literature, one should not assume that the tendency for the lowest castes to adopt higher caste ways implies necessarily an adoption of the Great Tradition. In most cases,

³¹ Ibid, p. 209.

³² Ibid, p. 191 seq.

it can, I think, be safely asserted that the norm, the ideals are local ones. These local ones are not disassociated from the values enshrined in the Great Tradition but contain elements from it also. With respect to this Srinivas pointed out the necessity for local field studies of a structural nature. It was necessary he said "to study each field-instance of Sanskritization in relation to the locally dominant caste and other factors."³³

It is important to remember before framing all-India Hindu value systems in greater detail or working out the relations of the ideas of the Great Tradition and those of the locality to gather more data along the lines outlined above. But we can emphasize the point that the norms and values, which are admired and sought to be adopted by local low castes, are those of the regional upper castes, including those of the Brahmans. With respect to this local variation Srinivas says, "I have been asked by more than one student of Indian anthropology whether I regard Sanskritization as only a one-way process, and whether the local culture is always a recipient. The answer is clear; it is a two-way process though the local cultures seem to have received more than they have given. In this connection it should be remembered that throughout Indian history local elements have entered into the main body of Sanskritic belief, myth and custom, and in their travel throughout the length and breadth of India, elements of Sanskritic culture have undergone different changes in the different culture areas. Festivals such as the Dasara, Dipavali, and Holi have no doubt certain common features all over the country, but they have also important regional peculiarities." In the case of some festivals only the name is common all over India and everything else is different—the same name implies different things to people in different regions. Similarly each region has its own body of folklore about the heroes of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and not infrequently, epic incidents and characters are related to outstanding features of local geography. And in every part of India are to be found Brahmans who worship local deities, which preside over epidemics, cattle, children's lives, and crops, besides the great gods of all-India Hinduism. Throughout Indian history Sanskritic Hinduism has absorbed local and folk elements and their presence makes easier the further absorption of similar elements. The absorption is done in such a way that there is a

³³ Srinivas, *Introduction to the Civilization of India*, p. 380.

continuity between the folk and the theological or philosophical levels, and this makes possible both the gradual transformation of the folk larger as well as the "vulgarization" of the theological layer.³⁴

The problem of local variation is not one which is being faced in modern times only. Of possible interest are similar statements made by different law-givers in the Dharma Sutra, for instance, with respect to the local variations which existed in those days. Gautama³⁵ formulates a general attitude towards local 'dharma's'. They were as follows: the basic principles enumerated in the Veda were to be recognised; local or family usages or rites, whatever they may be, are permitted provided they also do not contravene the Vedic rites. The commentaries on these Dharma Sutras reveal a number of interesting local practices and customs not all of which are approved. Among the approved are religious practices such as the worship of the Mother Goddess (Matrupuja); festivals such as those of Indra's banner and of the spring festival called the Holaka; the adoration of certain plants and trees and the worship of the bull and bull racing. Among local customs which were disapproved were marriage with a maternal uncle's daughter (refer to current South Indian practice) and the immediate consummation of marriage in Videha (refer to Gargya Narayana on Asvalayana Dharma Sutra 1.7.2). As in worship, so in marriage. Asvalayana states "Varied are the dharmas of different parts of the country and even of different villages; they should be followed."³⁶ Asvalayana adds that the regulations which he lays down refer only to those essential Vedic rites which should commonly be observed in all marriages. Here side by side with the acceptance of local variations we find the attempt to transmit Vedic rites and practices. Apastamba closes his Dharma Sutras thus: "There is quite a lore among the women and the Sudras; all that would legitimately come under the Atharva Vada. It is therefore not possible to exhaust Dharma; we can only lay down this principle: in all regions, those prevalent practices should be adhered to which have the approval of local elders and disciplined members of the community, the nobles, one of self possession not likely to act under avarice or vanity. All such local and peculiar usages

³⁴ *Introduction to the Civilization of India*, p. 378.

³⁵ Gautama Dharma Sutra XI, 22.23.

³⁶ Asvalayana Griha Sutra, 1-7.1-2.

one should know from the common folk and the women”.

The village of Kisan Garhi showed its own peculiar customs. Nevertheless local Brahmins were at the head of the local caste hierarchy. Further village studies for similar data should be conducted. Some of the available regional data however bear out the contention of Srinivas as well as those of the writers of the Dharma Sutras.

If one takes the question of diet, that of the Brahmins should, strictly speaking, be vegetarian, with the exception of types of vegetable products like garlic. This is what Sanskrit literature lays down. But the Kashmiri, the Bengali and the Saraswat Brahmins of Maharashtra eat flesh and, or fish. Nevertheless they are recognised as Brahmins and as the highest caste in the locality by local people.

All Hindus are theoretically speaking enjoined to marry within their caste. There are exceptions, of course, in practice and the most notable one is that of the Nambudri Brahmins. The younger sons of Nambudris consort with Nayar women and do not marry Nambudri girls. If their association with Nayar women can be termed marriage, here is a clear exception to the rule.

These are some of the types of preferred marriages in South India, including those among the Brahmins, according to Karve.

1. In a large number of castes the first preference is given by a man choosing his elder sister's daughter as a bride. Karve gives the example of the Brahman Gundu who married Tulu his eldest sister's daughter.³⁷

This practice needless to say is debarred to North Indian Brahmins.

2. Another type of preferred marriage is a man's marriage with his father's sister's daughter. Karve shows how Sadashiva, a Brahman marries Kanta his father's sister's daughter.³⁸

3. A third type of preferred marriage is of a man marrying his mother's brother's daughter. The Havig Brahmins of Karnatak, for instance, practice this kind of marriage. There is a clear variance here from North Indian Brahman custom.

The regional variations in diet and marriage customs are obvious.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 188.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 190.

On investigation variations with regard to other customs and ideas will be, no doubt, found. Certain elements pertaining to all-India Hinduism will be found in the regions or the localities. One such idea is the notion of the supremacy of the Brahman. Another such is perhaps the idea of Karma. But before any such constructions are made with respect to an all-India system of values, the importance of regional structural studies is clear. It is doubtful whether one can advance very far by approaching the problem from the cultural standpoint only. What is also clear is that the supremacy of the Brahmans has to be understood primarily as a regional supremacy, and that, if he seems as a symbol of social values, it is as a symbol of regional social values and to local people primarily. The point, I think is sufficiently clear.

SUMMARY

Let us sum up some of the foregoing discussions. We find firstly that there is a certain dichotomy of values and customs as between the high castes and the low castes and tribes of Hindu Society.

Second, the lower orders of local Hindu society have in the recent past, and are now trying to adopt the values and practices of the local upper castes.

Third, as the upper castes theoretically admire the practices of the Brahmans of that region or locality and as the Brahman is at the apex of every regional or local caste system, the logic of emulating upper caste practices is finally to emulate those of the Brahmans, though many may be emulating the behaviour of the dominant caste at any given moment.

Fourth, the value system which the local Brahman upholds is a local one. It has undoubtedly all-India elements. To find out these all-India elements and the local elements is a matter of investigation, preferably of the local social structures. The theory of Karma has been proposed as a possible system of ideas which have a very wide sway in Hindu India. The 'theory of Karma' has the effect of reinforcing the supremacy of the Brahman's social position and his values and practices.

The caste system is universal in Hindu India. Associated with the caste system is the notion that each caste or out-caste must

perform a specific set of duties assigned to it. The Brahman's position is also universally accorded as being at the top in every regional caste system. If you accept the 'dharma' of the performance of caste duties and regard the function of the Brahman as the highest, you implicitly set a premium on the Brahman values. From this position to regard the Brahman as the physical embodiment of the highest values in that given society is but a short step. The Brahman is the embodiment of God on earth is a well-known saying in Hindu India. This short step seems to have been taken. The striving of the lower castes to adopt ultimately the values and practices of the Brahmins as seen in the numerous cases cited testify to their belief in their supremacy. The Brahman thus seems to have become the model and the symbol of the ideals of his society. It may be argued that the Brahman himself has formulated his high position. The fact, that society has let him do so and, moreover, has accepted his formulation by and large, only reinforces the argument that it largely regards him as the symbol of the highest ideals of his regional society. And the strength of his position is shown by the fact that he validates the behaviour of other politically and economically more powerful caste groups, although they differ from his own.

CONCLUSIONS

IN SEEKING SOME correlates of caste status in Hindu society the following conclusions seem to emerge:

An examination of any possible correlations between physical or racial characteristics and caste status seems to show that such a correlation exists, but only in certain areas. In the area of the U.P. and the Bihar, there seems to be a correlation generally between caste status and physical characteristics, a certain type of physical characteristics being associated with the upper castes and certain other types with the lowest castes.

This, however, does not hold good in the Punjab, where there are no differences, it seems, according to Risley, in physical characteristics between the top and the bottom castes.

On the evidence available it does not seem to hold good also in Maharashtra, where the Marathi Brahmins are physically similar to castes in the middle group, and very low castes have physical characteristics similar to the upper castes of the Punjab, U.P. and Bihar. Similarly the untouchable Chandals of Bengal have physical characteristics similar to the high castes of the province.

In Gujarat the general population tends to be homogenous, though certain differences appear between the top castes and some of the lowest castes, according to Majumdar and Kishen. In South India, according to Ghurye citing Risley's data, there is no simple correlation between physical characteristics and social rank. The same applies to Orissa. Thus though in certain areas physical differences between the lowest and highest castes appear, in general for the major run of castes, there is, as Ghurye says, no simple correlation between caste status and physical characteristics.

Another aspect of this question is the existence of the consciousness of race in evaluating caste status. The evidence available seems to show that such a consciousness does not generally exist. Caste origins and pride in them is bound up with mythological personages—gods, heroes or sages and not with race. For in-

stance, the Barhai or carpenter caste of the U.P. claims descent from the god Viswakarma; the Arash from the Brahman hero Parasuram and the Agarwalas of Bihar from a king Agra Sena and so on.

Associated with the question of the correlation of caste status and race is the theory of the origin of the caste system as being due to the conquest of racial groups by others. Historical evidence records such conquests. But facts regarding the formation and growth of non-Indian caste societies, the similarity of some of these societies to the Indian caste society, as well as the evidence yielded by various anthropometric surveys in India point out that such a theory of the origin of caste society is too simple. Conquest seems to have been one of the factors in the formation of Hindu caste society, but only one. As Kroeber points out "the history of Indian caste is extremely complex and its causes manifold. Any attempt to explain the system on the basis of a single factor may therefore be attractive to those who like simple formulae, but is foredoomed to partiality and unsoundness. While race consciousness may have given the first impetus to Indian caste it is at present, and has been for a long time past, a much less potent factor than economic status.¹ Among the other factors leading to the emergence of Indian caste society division of labour backed by mystical sanctions and notions of avoidance seem to have been one. Another factor is the sub-division of occupations and increased stratification due to technical advance. If Hindu caste society has had a complex origin one can understand why in some cases there is a correlation between caste status and physical characteristics, and in other cases there is not.

Has high caste status any correlation with local numerical preponderance either singly as a caste or as against the rest of the population? The question should be examined, as I pointed out, on two levels—the village level and the supra village levels. On the village level there is not sufficient direct data on the subject. In the recent village studies in about half the cases was a high caste (dominant or otherwise) numerically the single largest caste. Thus one cannot make a statement on the question one way or the other with respect to the village level on the basis of the direct evidence available.

¹ *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. III-IV, p. 255.

There are, however, as has been pointed out, good reasons for taking as unit an area larger than the village as well in examining Indian caste society. If we examine the numerical ratios between castes on the district level throughout any particular state we find that (a) neither the high castes and (b) nor any particular dominant caste is generally numerically the largest caste in the district, let alone being larger than the rest of the district combined. As a matter of fact in Northern India the three so-called upper castes, the "Twice-Born Castes," together are not generally superior in numbers to the rest of the total population. It seems probable that on the village level in the majority of villages the dominant caste is not numerically the single largest caste and that the same is true with respect to high castes in general. Caste dominance exists above the district level as well, and we have seen that on this plane dominant groups like, the Marathas in Malwa or the Royal caste in Malabar, were definitely not numerically preponderant.

In the economic sphere a correlation was found to exist between a high caste status and wealth, particularly in land. High castes were seen on the whole to predominate in wealth, or clean castes, which had attained wealth, were seen to be able to acquire a higher status. This seems to accord more or less with what the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* has said, in general, about status. "Most frequently, however, it is economic class which is found to be correlated with status, although only rarely does this correlation approach anything like completeness, if only because changes in legal status tend to lag behind changes in the social system. But economic class lines are not necessarily reflected directly in status. The influence may be indirect and the fact situations must be distinguished from the legal theory that creates and recognises status" Max Radin.²

In Hindu caste society there was, however, seen to be a certain limit to this correlation. Cases have been seen of untouchable caste groups, who could not break through the barrier of untouchability in spite of having acquired comparative wealth. Poor Brahmans also are generally accorded respect due to the highest caste in spite of their lack of wealth.

² Op. cit p. 273.

The dominant caste of any area was found to possess a high caste status. Nevertheless in a number of respects the dominant castes did not conform to the regulations arising from the Pollution Concept, the local or the general Brahmanical rules of conduct. For this it did not suffer loss of caste status. It rather served as a separate model for social behaviour other than the Brahmanical mode. The dominant caste has a peculiar dual attitude towards the Brahman caste, possessing secular power, even over the Brahman but acknowledging his supremacy. On the one hand there is competition for power between the two, conflict. On the other hand the dominant caste relies on the Brahman for the ritual basis of its position in society, and the Brahman on the dominant caste for protection and maintenance.

Economic power by itself does not correlate with caste dominance. It was seen that wealthy castes are not necessarily dominant. The acquisition of political power and in the past of military political power was also necessary to achieve dominance, it would seem.

But whilst political—economic power is correlated with a high status and castes possessing such powers can afford to ignore Brahmanical rules, the supreme position of the Brahman was seen to be not correlated with political and economical power necessarily. The wealth of the Untouchable castes again did not help them to break through the barrier of untouchability. What factors then correlated with the Brahman's high position? By eliminating other possible correlates—politico-economical power, numbers, wealth, physical characteristics—we were left with 3 possible correlates of the Brahman's high position. His position could be correlated with, or let us say, could depend on:

- (1) His position as an intermediary between God and man.
- (2) His "sacral" nature as a priest with dreaded powers.
- (3) The fact that he embodies the highest ideals of the local system of beliefs and ideas. There is in addition a certain amount of positive evidence to show that he does serve as such a model.

It seems that the system of ideas, beliefs and rites associated with the structure of Hindu society generates in turn its own forces, which vary in strength in influencing caste status according to the

time and the place. We have mentioned that dominant castes in the areas studied did not conform to the locally accepted or general Brahmanical rules of ritual conduct in certain important respects. Nevertheless they retained their high caste status. On the other hand certain sections of dominant castes have suffered degradation for a too marked departure from the locally accepted ritual standards. Thus, for instance, Ibbetson points out how the Chauhan Rajputs, once the rulers of the Delhi area prior to the coming of the Muslims, were degraded in rank by other Rajputs, because they started the practice of widow remarriage.³

An examination of the local interplay of political, economical, ritual force is necessary to explain each of the above phenomena.

It is obvious, however, that the contention, that caste status depends or is correlated with strict adherence by the caste of the ritual rules arising from the Pollution Concept, is not completely true, because it was seen, for instance, that a number of dominant castes violated these rules. On the other hand the position of the Brahman was not necessarily correlated with economic or political power, numbers or race. With respect to the Untouchable we have seen again that poverty is not the sole factor correlated with his degradation—his low status is also enforced by the local system of beliefs and ideals.

We see here, then, the operation of both sets of factors—political, economical and together with them the factor of the local system of ideas and beliefs. The interaction of both sets have to be kept in mind in analysing any particular situation. With respect to the position of the Brahmans and the Untouchables the force of these system of ideas and beliefs have a very powerful effect as long as the structure of Hindu society remains what it is. Given the existence of this social structure, we may say that within the poles of Brahmanhood and Untouchability, caste status is correlated with political and economical power to a considerable but varying degree according to the local situation. Nevertheless even in this sphere ritual factors play a more or less important part. Marriot says "Money lending and control of land rights seem to provide the most effective levers of securing higher rank in Kisan Garhi at the present day. Money

³ Punjab Census, pp. 175, 188.

and land do not directly affect caste standing since their possession does not in itself constitute a ritual fact. They become effective for ranking purposes only when, and if, the influence they yield, can be translated into those ritual interactions which are significant for rank".⁴ However powerful in the secular sense, it is doubtful if a local caste can achieve any measure of dominance by totally violating the local Brahmanical code, by ignoring the local ritual completely. The Smiths of Mysore have, as we noticed, set out to do it with the result that they form a society by themselves, are practically outcaste. On this point Marriot says "Complete withdrawal from ritual interaction seems extremely rare and would be painful if not impossible for most castes".⁵ This is the force which ritual factors play even in those areas where political and economical factors operate most strongly. In the sphere of Brahmanhood and Untouchability the factors related to local systems of ideas and beliefs operate more strongly. It follows from the above discussion that caste status cannot be correlated with any single factor.

The duality in the attitude of dominant castes to Brahmins brings out the fact also that caste status is correlated with the local interplay of a number of forces. The Brahmin is the supreme caste, but power is in the hands of the dominant caste. The ideal of the Brahmanic way of life is held up to be emulated, but at the same time the ideals of the dominant caste are also emulated. A structural principles of Hindu caste society seems to be the conflict and co-operation between the Brahmins and the dominant caste. When the Brahmin becomes the dominant caste, it was seen that Hindu ideas, beliefs and, as a result, society tends to be undermined, as we have seen in certain cases in South India in the shape of widespread anti-Brahmin movements. When the dominant caste has only hostile relations to the Brahmins, it undermines the ritual basis of its own social position. One may say, perhaps, that it is the clash and mutual reinforcement, the interplay of these political, economical, and ritual factors, which creates their duality in Hindu society. The economic factor or more strictly speaking the politico-economic-military factor is strongly correlated with a high caste status, but the operation of these factors is limited to a more or less extent according to the local situation

⁴ *Men in India*, April-June, 1959, p. 99.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 100.

and the time, by the force of Hindu ideas. Hindu ideas are associated, it is true, with the structure of Hindu society but they achieve a force of their own within certain limits.

To recapitulate: There seems little correlation between physical characteristics and caste status. There is none, it seems, on a district level between numerical preponderance and caste status.

There is a correlation between politico—economical factors and caste status, but this is limited by the system of ideas and beliefs, particularly those arising from the Pollution Concept, which in turn are associated with the given social structure. The interaction between these two sets of factors have a strong bearing on the status of a given caste in a locality.

“Finally, one must answer the charge “Of what use is it?”

Too often social research has been accused of being merely academical. Investigators, of course, investigate. It is for men of affairs to frame practical conclusions from investigations. Nevertheless the charge has to be answered. For in science the acid test of a theory is the question “Does it work?” This is true of medicine and should be of social science. This is also the only way to bring the relevance and coherence of the subject to many. Everybody is concerned with the business of living in society, with social affairs. The answers to many questions are given, known or framed, but on the basis of limited experience, limited data. That is, they lack certainty. Hence, sociological investigation may not always give original answers, but they should give more accurate ones. The difference is in the degree of certainty. Some practical implications are easy to draw, others would require more thought. For instance, if, leaving aside the Brahman and the Untouchable, status depends on property holding, particularly land holding, in the rural areas, obviously an equalisation of wealth in this area would tend to equalise statuses. This is borne out by the examples cited of castes which have arisen in status by acquiring landed property like the Distillers of Bisipara in Orissa.

In industrial areas sub-caste organizations have little function and hence the social phenomenon of the emergence of those organizations which serve the professional or occupational needs of

local people—professional and trade organizations. These undermine the parochial sub-caste organizations increasingly. This is also strikingly confirmed in the political sphere. Industrial areas in West Bengal, Bombay, etc. show far less of the phenomenon of 'casteism' than for instance more rural areas like Rajasthan and the Ganges plains. The conclusion is, of course, too obvious to state: the spread of industrialisation eventually undermines caste and casteism.

The introduction of modern science into agriculture and its mechanization, particularly the mechanization of what is regarded as dirty, polluting work, no doubt will help to remove prejudice in this sphere. If the analyses have been correct, these changes will help to change ideas about Brahmanhood and Untouchability also. Because although there is no direct connection between agricultural techniques and these ideas, they were shown to be associated with a social system, based on agriculture, on caste dominance through monopolising agricultural land, and small scale handicraft. If agriculture is modernised and rural wealth equalised, the social system itself would change. What role would these associated ideas play then? Their function would then have disappeared.

To be accurate, however, one has to state that the social system is changing, has changed to an extent, as, for instance, our examination of changes in village society showed in earlier Chapter. The aim then should be to predict changes and enable them to be made more intelligently. It is quite easy to see that one of the forces buttressing caste is marriage restrictions. One of the effects of industrialisation would then be, by expanding social opportunities of both men and women, to remove marriage from the sphere of caste. As proof, both the demand for and the fact of intercaste (and inter-communal) marriage is in the industrialised city areas.

Without wishing to criticise social reformers, nevertheless the evidence seem to be that an ounce of industrial development has been more effective in bringing about social changes, than a few tons of preaching. This should not be made to sound one-sided. It is not to argue that preaching, propaganda and education are ineffective. It is to show their limitations in a given situation. This, if nothing else, is the justification of sociological reach. The days of the miracle workers, unfortunately, are over. On the

other hand you have a few people who lament the social changes that are taking place. Can they be wished away? After all, as the Sutta Nipata says, "No Brahman is such by birth." (v. 136). It is sometimes said that India was the first to build such cities like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. The logic of such complaints appears to be that it was a mistake to have taken the first step in this direction. Much literature since the Vedas have been written in India, but the Vedas remain, though its tribal society has gone. Today we use atomic power, but does it mean that we have forgotten to breed plants or to cook, just because they were earlier discoveries? The study of societies and archaeology indicates the retention of the valuable in the past, their use in a new setting. "In response to the demands of time and place what is proper may become improper, and what is improper may become proper." (Santi Parva, 79.31). There are, of course, no limits to advance. The Buddha said: "All composite things pass. Vigilantly strive onward." (Digha Nikaya, pp. 155-156).

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